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ABSTRACT

This document was written to provide state and local child support offices with help in refining their case processing systems. The guide is divided into five chapters. Chapter I, Case Processing Overview, defines case processing and the case processing functions and provides a narrative description and graphic illustration of the processes involved in a case processing workflow. Chapter II, Planning and Management Considerations for Achieving Efficient and Effective Systems, emphasizes the importance of establishing case processing goals and objectives which support goals of the child support program; presents some essential steps of the planning process; and discusses staff involvement, staff training, component compatibility, resource allocation, and documentation. Chapter III, Elements Which Expedite Case Processing, identifies and discusses elements which help to expedite case movement and lists elements common to good case processing systems. Chapter IV, Elements of Caseload Management Which Enhance Case Processing, defines case management and discusses the need for case management and its relationship to effective case processing. Chapter V, Improving Case Processing Productivity Through Office Automation, discusses what an automated case processing system is and what benefits an organization may obtain from using office automation technology. A model for automating a case processing system is discussed. Four activities and 28 figures are included. (NB)

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A GUIDE FOR DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING

A CASE PROCESSING SYSTEM FOR

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Prepared by

Office of Child Support Enforcement
U.S. Department of Health and
Human Services

April 1986

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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This publication, A Guide for Designing and Implementing a Case Processing System for Child Support Enforcement, is written to provide State/local child support offices with some tools for refining their case processing systems. The increasing demands for child support services and recent changes in child support legislation, the greater emphasis on the need for effective program operations, and the desire for increased collections have driven many child support offices to evaluate their programmatic activities and performance. Although there has always been a need for program efficiency and effectiveness, the Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984 mandate changes which will require even more demands upon existing case processing systems with little or no additional staff increases. These amendments require all States to implement procedures which have been proven to be successful in programs operated by the various States. To implement these procedures, however, effective case processing systems must be refined or devised and put in place because how well your case processing and case management system is designed and implemented determines your program's success.

This guide provides a discussion of case processing and its required elements, explains how to plan and manage an effective and efficient case processing system, and provides techniques for improving case processing and management. In addition, it explains the concepts of automation, discusses the benefits to be gained from automating your case processing system, and describes a step-by-step approach for implementing automation to assist in case processing and management.

AUDIENCE

The target audience for this guide includes anyone who is involved, at any level, in planning or implementing case processing and management activities. This may

include child support enforcement staff at State and local offices, contracting offices, attorneys, or other individuals responsible for processing child support enforcement cases. This guide is also appropriate for anyone who desires a better understanding of the critical factors required for an efficient and effective case processing and management system.

ORGANIZATION

This guide consists of five sections:

- Case Processing Overview
- Planning and Management Considerations for Achieving Efficient and Effective Case Processing Systems
- Elements Which Expedite Case Processing
- Elements of Caseload Management Which Enhance Case Processing
- Improving Case Processing Productivity Through Office Automation

Chapter I. - Case Processing Overview - Defines case processing and the case processing functions and provides both a narrative description and a graphic illustration of the processes involved in a case processing workflow.

Chapter II. - Planning and Management Considerations for Achieving Efficient and Effective Systems - Discusses the importance of establishing case processing goals and objectives which support overall goals of the child support program. Some essential steps of the planning process are presented to guide managers in planning. Also discussed are the importance of staff involvement and training as well as component compatibility, proper resource allocation and documenting policy and procedures.

Chapter III. - Elements Which Expedite Case Processing - Identifies and discusses various elements which help to expedite case movement and lists those elements which are common to good case processing systems. Explanations of these elements and methods by which these elements can become a part of a case processing system are given.

Chapter IV. - Elements of Caseload Management Which Enhance Case Processing - Defines case management and discusses the need for case management and its relationship to effective case processing. The elements of case management which are essential to successful case processing are explained and the methods for developing each element are discussed. Since control is vital to effective case processing, it is covered in this special section apart from case processing.

Chapter V. - Improving Case Processing Productivity Through Office Automation - Discusses what an automated case processing system is and what benefits an organization may obtain from using office automation technology. In addition, a model for automating a case processing system is discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

CASE PROCESSING OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

All child support offices need to develop a system of policies, procedures and practices essential for the successful processing of child support enforcement cases. No matter what type of system used, there are some basic concepts common to each one. This section defines case processing and describes these basic concepts. In addition, the need for effective case processing is also discussed. The following discussion serves as the basis for this workbook and sets the stage for the following sections.

DEFINITION OF CASE PROCESSING

For the purpose of this publication "case processing" is defined as a step-by-step method of working a child support case aimed at meeting two major objectives: (1) to establish an enforceable case; and (2) to collect support payments. To meet these objectives, child support offices have designed organizational structures and work activities that attempt to promote case processing. As a result, three basic types of case processing systems have emerged:

- Caseworker System - Child support workers are assigned a segment of the caseload and perform all of the necessary case processing activities for cases within this grouping.

- Functional System - The child support office is divided into components responsible for various case processing functions of intake, locate, establishment and enforcement.

- Team System - The child support office is divided into groups of child support workers who perform the necessary case processing activities

(e.g., one part of the team may perform the intake and establishment functions, whereas another part of the group may perform the enforcement function).

Although the type of system in use differs among child support offices, basic case processing activities must be performed at some point. These activities are divided into functional categories and include: intake, locate, establishment, enforcement and collection/distribution .

DEFINITION OF CASE PROCESSING FUNCTIONS

Effective case processing is dependent on the accomplishment of required case activity within each function, as described throughout this section. Although the nomenclature may vary among child support offices, each function serves a specific purpose and involves performing various case processing activities. Upon receiving each child support referral, the functions necessary to complete case processing are determined. It is important to note that every child support case may not require the completion of all the functions described in a fixed order. The following definitions of each function, its purpose and potential activities are assumed and used throughout this guide.

Intake

Definition

The process of obtaining a referral document from Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), an application from a non-public assistance custodian or from an interstate agency.

Purpose

To establish the referral as an official child support case.

Potential Activities

- o Screen case for accuracy and completeness
- o Establish a case file
- o Route case to the next appropriate activity

Locate

Definition

The process of verifying point of contact (i.e., residence and/or place of employment of an absent parent).

Purpose

To determine the whereabouts of the absent parent so that action can be taken to process the case.

Potential Activities

- o Postal verification
- o Employer verification
- o State Parent Locator Service (SPLS)
- o Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS)
- o Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)

Establishment

Definition

The process of determining paternity and/or of obtaining a child support order through the court or by administrative process.

Purpose

To obtain court or administrative order so that child support payments can be collected.

Potential Activities

- o Conducting paternity interviews
- o Blood Testing
- o Stipulation or court action

Enforcement

Definition

The process of securing child support obligations using a variety of legal and/or administrative remedies.

Purpose

To secure child support payments as required by law.

Potential Activities

- o Contacting absent parent
- o Wage assignments, garnishments and liens
- o Court actions

Collection And Distribution

Definition

The process of receiving child support payments and disbursing the monies according to State and Federal law.

Purpose

To receive and record child support payments to ensure that payments are posted to the correct account and accurately distributed.

Activities

- o Receiving and posting payments
- o Calculating arrearages
- o Billing absent parents

THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE CASE PROCESSING

Effective case processing is a critical issue for child support enforcement offices nationwide. Even though your office may have an established system for performing case processing, specific issues, requirements, and concerns may need to be addressed. As a result of conducting several operational studies, analysts from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement identified several case processing problem areas common to most established systems. They include:

- Timeliness of referrals to and from other sources and components.
- The rate at which referrals and applications are entering, dropping out and completing the case flow cycle.
- The degree, if any, of case backlogging.
- The lack of, or the excessive use of, case reviews.
- The degree of duplication of case processing activities throughout the processing cycle.
- The appropriateness of all of the steps in the case processing cycle.
- The extent to which operating personnel should be apprised of best practices for case processing.
- Timeliness of follow-up actions on cases during the case processing cycle.
- The appropriateness of a prioritization scheme.
- Whether the current use of forms in case processing is necessary and designed to enhance case processing.
- Whether files are accessible and easily located.

Each of these areas represents an obstacle to effective case processing. If your office is experiencing problems within these areas, your current system may not lend itself to timely, successful case processing. During this era of increasing demand for child support services, increasing caseloads and limited time and resources, you and your office need a case processing system that promotes effective caseflow through the necessary functions of intake, locate, establishment, enforcement and collection/distribution.

As previously mentioned, effective and efficient case processing is an essential element in meeting the mandates of the Child Support Amendments of 1984. In order to execute the various enforcement techniques with minimal effort, your case processing system needs to ensure that needed case information is obtained and necessary case activities are performed. Mandatory wage assignment requires successful absent parent locate and established court orders. Federal tax offset requires established court orders and the social security numbers for each absent parent. The successful completion of these case processing activities can only lead to successful enforcement and collection of child support obligations. Clearly, the design and implementation of an effective case processing system has direct implications for attaining program objectives and incentives for efficient and effective case processing.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF CASE PROCESSING WORKFLOW

This section provides a generic narrative and workflow diagram (Figure 1) that describes how a case typically flows through all of the functions of child support in a IV-D case processing system. The description covers the basic functions and is not meant to apply to any special type of organization. Whether the case processing structure is functional or team oriented, the basic functions must be performed at some point. The objective of this narrative and the caseflow diagram which follows is to provide a frame of reference for case processing for the other provisions of this workbook.

GENERIC CASE WORKFLOW

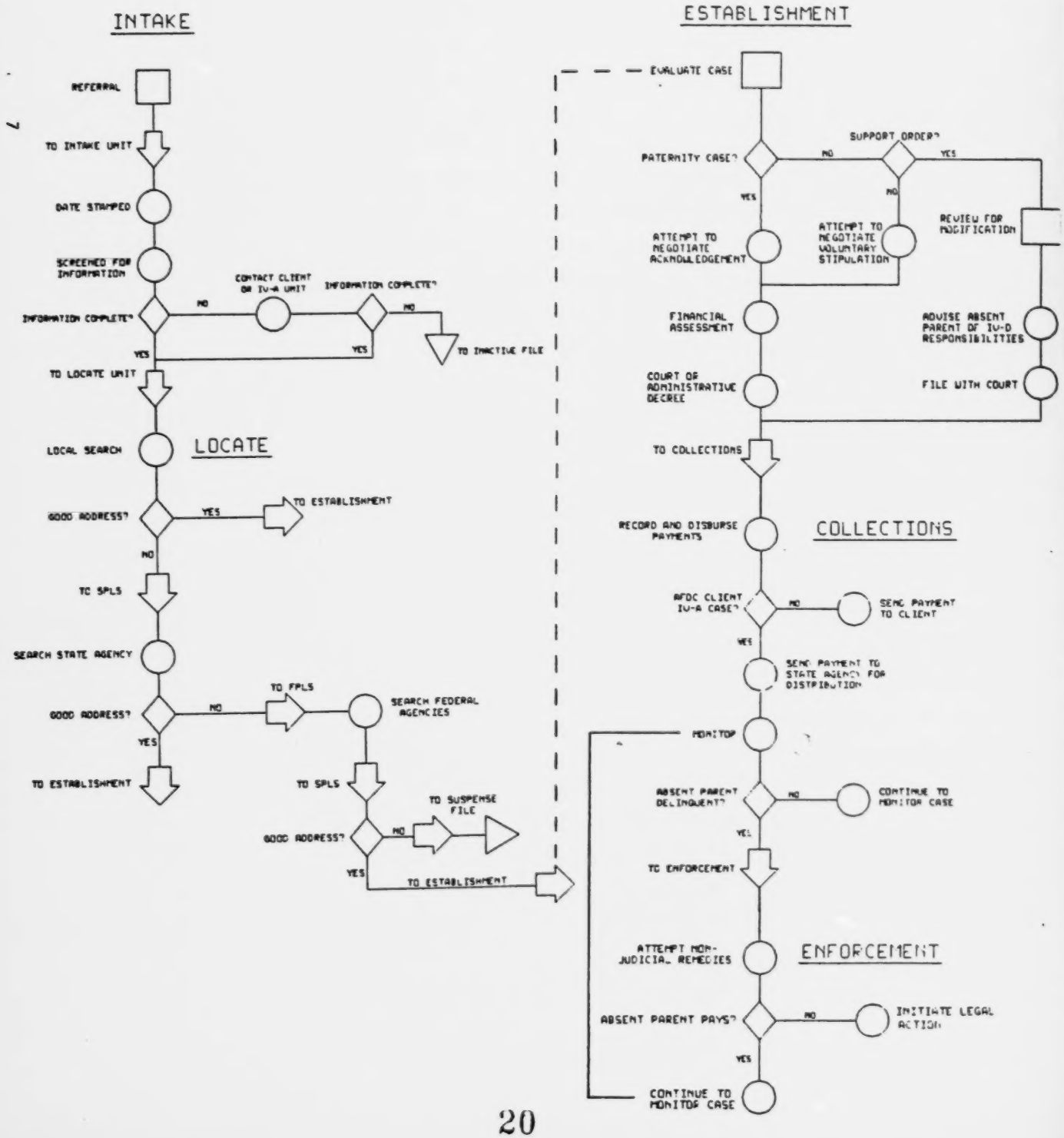


FIGURE 1

Narrative Description

IV-D units receive referrals from IV-A, applications from non-AFDC custodial parents, and URESA petitions from other States. Incoming referrals are date-stamped and screened to determine if the information on them is sufficient. If the information is not sufficient, the items may either be returned to the source or the custodial parent may be contacted for additional information. When there is sufficient information, a case file is established and the case proceeds to the locate function where an attempt is made to locate the absent parent (AP) by searching local sources. If this search is unsuccessful, the case may be sent to the State Parent Locator Unit for a search of State agencies and also to the Federal Parent Locator Service for a further search of the AP's address. Cases in which addresses of absent parents are not located may be suspended for later action or closed out entirely. When an address is located, the case proceeds to the order and/or paternity establishment function.

If the case already has an order established, a copy of the order must be obtained, the absent parent informed of his responsibilities, and the order filed with the court. If the case is a paternity case and requires order establishment, an attempt is made to obtain an acknowledgement of paternity and a voluntary stipulation of support. If they are obtained, they are validated by a court or administrative process according to jurisdictional procedures. If unable to negotiate an agreement with the absent parent, evidence to initiate court action must be gathered. An assessment of financial ability to pay must also be performed. If the court rules in favor of paternity, a judgment is rendered and a support order is established. The case then proceeds to the collections/enforcement function for recording, collections, disbursement and monitoring of the support payments. If the court does not rule in favor of paternity, the case is closed.

If the case is not a paternity case and needs an order, an attempt is made to negotiate a voluntary stipulation of support. If unsuccessful, legal action will be initiated and a financial assessment will be performed. The case will then go to the court or through an administrative process. After an order is established, the case

proceeds to the collection function for recordation, collection, disbursement and monitoring of payments. If the negotiation of the voluntary stipulation is successful, it is validated through the court and becomes an enforceable order. If the absent parent becomes delinquent, the case proceeds to the enforcement function to pursue non-judicial remedies initially. If the child support office is unable to obtain compliance through these remedies, the case is referred for legal action.

CHAPTER TWO

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACHIEVING EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CASE PROCESSING SYSTEMS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we discuss planning and management considerations for achieving effective case processing systems. It is extremely important that management set the tone for achieving program goals through management planning. Accordingly, the following topics are discussed in this chapter:

- Establishment of Case Processing Objectives
- Staff Involvement and Commitment
- Resource Allocation
- Updated Policy and Procedures Manual
- Training
- Coordinating Case Processing Activities Involving Multiple Components

ESTABLISHMENT OF CASE PROCESSING OBJECTIVES

Planning for case processing involves making decisions about results to be derived from your case processing system and determining the best means of achieving those results. Without planning it will be very difficult to have an efficient and effective system because the lack of direction, or a target to aim for, can leave your system floundering. A clear statement of objectives is needed to provide a sound basis for choosing the best methods for achieving results and assessing performance of your case processing system.

The objectives established for your IV-D case processing system should support the overall goals of the child support program. These goals are to reduce the cost of welfare, ensure financial support of children by their parents, and foster family responsibility. In support of these goals equal consideration must be given to all types of cases, (e.g., AFDC cases, non-AFDC cases and URESA cases).

There are many variations among State IV-D programs due to different laws, regulations, political and organizational alignments. However, despite these variations the following steps can be taken by all units in planning for an efficient and effective case processing system:

- Top management (i.e., the IV-D Director and/or other key decision makers) develops overall goals for the case processing system consistent with OCSE program goals.

- With input from employees, each unit manager develops objectives which support the overall case processing goals but also are realistic, challenging and attainable.

- Management develops action plans, policies and procedures for case processing that will enhance meeting objectives.

- Management develops a monitoring system for feedback on attainment of objectives.

These steps represent an approach to planning whereby the management and staff of an organization jointly identify their common goals and define each individual's areas of responsibility in terms of results. In Utah, for instance, the IV-D program is an excellent example of this approach. It is organized under a team concept with teams divided into regions. Each team has complete responsibility for processing a set of cases from beginning to end. Goals, objectives and standards are negotiated by the team members, team managers and the IV-D Director. Collection goals are established by the State legislature based upon a cost benefit

formula. Top management and team managers meet to establish reasonable time frames for working cases through the functions. Job plan agreements with specific tasks and standards are negotiated with the employees to set the level of expected performance. There are monthly reviews and discussions between employees and supervisors concerning performance. Monthly reports are used to monitor State and regional progress culminating in a year end evaluation.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT AND COMMITMENT

What happens after goals and objectives have been established? How will they be implemented? Who is going to implement them? Why should they? What's in it for them? What type of environment have you developed to motivate your staff to achieve the goals and objectives that have been set? Did they participate in setting the goals and objectives? Do you encourage them to be innovative and make suggestions? Do you reward them for their performance? These are some of the questions that managers not only should but must consider to obtain what they want for the "organization" because no matter how well you have developed your case processing system, the success of it will depend on your staff to implement it. Remember, without staff commitment, you cannot make the best system in the world work. On the other hand, the staff can make the worst system work and will do so if they helped to develop it.

Why will it work? When staff is involved in the planning and decision making processes, they have more commitment to the accomplishment of program goals and objectives because they have a stake in determining the factors that will affect them. Further, people like to be recognized and rewarded for their good performance. They see themselves as winners. Consequently, management should design systems that continually reinforce this concept.

Developing An Awards System

An awards system should be carefully designed and have the following characteristics:

- It must be fair and objective.
- The performance must be measureable.
- All employees must have an equal chance to win.
- The criteria must be set in advance of awarding a unit, individual, etc.
- The criteria must be publicized.
- The reward must be valuable enough for the people to extend themselves.
- Recognition of the winner should be made public by presenting the award in a conspicuous manner (e.g., general staff meeting, newsletter, luncheon, etc.)

Many jurisdictions have established effective award systems and many have not. Generally, those jurisdictions that do not have such systems say that they do not have money or that the State Office does not permit monetary awards.

Kinds of Awards

Non-monetary

- Letter of Commendation which is put in the employee's personnel folder. Depending upon the level of achievement, the letter may come from one of the following officials:
  - Governor
  - Deputy Director of the Office of Child Support Enforcement
  - Department Head
  - IV-D Director
  - Regional Representative
  - Division or Unit Director
  - Immediate Supervisor

- o Plaques or Trophies
- o Achievement publicized in newsletter
- o Best parking spot for the month
- o Compensatory time off from work
- o Name of winner posted on bulletin board (office, department, etc.)

Monetary

- o Merit Increase
- o Bonus
- o Paid Vacation
- o Promotion
- o Suggestion Awards

Honor Type Award

- o Attend training classes
- o Attend conferences (National Child Support Enforcement Association or Regional Conferences)
- o Awards banquet
- o Luncheon

(Some jurisdictions use training money, contributions by supervisors, and vending machine profits to fund awards.)

In conclusion, it cannot be emphasized enough that staff involvement in the decision-making process is a key to commitment in attaining organizational and program goals. Additionally, staff like to be rewarded for doing a good job. Consequently, it is incumbent upon management--with staff input--to devise and implement incentives to enhance employee morale and organizational commitment.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Along with coordination of staff functions, it is important that staff be properly allocated to obtain the best results from case processing.

Two of the most important decisions are:

- Determining an optimal staffing level to improve collections and also be cost effective, and

- Determining where the resources on hand should be allocated to improve collections and to carry on all IV-D functions.

Formulas which address these two areas are presented in a workbook prepared for OCSE by Pacific Consulting Group entitled "Resource Balancing" published in March 1986. This model was developed and tested in the Essex County Child Support Program.

IV-D jurisdictions may often decide upon the optimal staffing level for units based upon the best results received by experimenting with various staffing levels. In Utah, for example, better results were obtained in case processing in the region which had fewer cases per employee than the other regions. It was then decided based upon this experience that if employees were to be expected to work all cases within a reasonable length of time (4-6 months), the optimal number of cases per employee should be about 250.

Despite the method used for determining resource allocation, State budget restrictions and fragmented control of IV-D functions are important factors to consider. State personnel ceilings may prohibit hiring additional personnel and fragmented control may make it difficult or impossible to shift personnel among functions. The following are some other considerations for managers in allocating staff resources:

Staffing Mix

In resource allocation, an important consideration is the proper staffing ratio of clerical to technical employees, and of supervisory employees to non-supervisory employees. Determining the proper ratios is not an easy task and there is no exact formula for establishing them.

Clerical/Technical Ratio

To determine the proper clerical/technical ratio, an assessment of the nature of the tasks that have to be performed in case processing should be made. The more routine tasks such as typing letters should be separated from the more judgmental tasks made by a caseworker in determining actions needed to establish an order. The clerical/technical ratio could be based upon the percentage of routine to judgmental tasks. For example, if judgmental tasks required to operate a unit total 60%, and routine tasks total 40%, the unit would require 4 clerks for every 6 technical personnel.

Supervisor/Non Supervisor Ratio

The ratio of supervisors to workers can only be determined by the consideration of the span of control necessary for effective supervision. Factors to consider are:

- Kind of Activity - The more varied the activities of the job, the narrower the span of control needed. More supervisors per staff will be required. For example, a foreman on an assembly line would have more subordinates than a foreman in a job shop where each employee performs a greater variety of tasks.

- Kind of Personnel - Occupations in which employees traditionally work independently require a broader span of control and fewer supervisors per staff members. Attorneys, for example, require little supervision.

- Kind of Organization - A centralized organization encourages close supervision, more supervisors at every level, and a narrow span of control. For example, a IV-D program which is centralized at the State level and where all decisions relating to case processing through all of the functions are made at the State level, requires more supervisors per employee to insure that all mandates from the top are being followed. A decentralized organization, on the other hand, has broad control because decision making is moved to the lowest possible level.

UPDATED POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

Managers at all levels should explain organization policies and the operating procedures to the employees. After goals and objectives have been negotiated, the policies and procedures consistent with the objectives established should be documented in a manual. This policy and procedures manual should be accessible to all employees. Also, as more efficient case processing methods are discovered, they should be documented and placed in the manual. A cohesive, updated manual will help to reduce procedural discrepancies and reduce case processing time by detailing the most efficient methods of operations.

The procedures manual may serve as a reference tool for error citations under an ongoing quality control system. As the quality control system leads to improved practices and operations through feedback and investigation of variances from the norm by management, the manual should be updated. As it relates to case processing, the manual should contain the following provisions:

- organizational structure,
- workflow charts and narratives,
- copies of forms and case documentation requirements,
- job descriptions and
- a list of interacting components and their responsibilities for case processing.

TRAINING

Having set goals and objectives, developed new case processing procedures, and initiatives for staff involvement and commitment, can your employees perform the case processing tasks assigned them? Case processing goals and objectives can only be attained through the employees who are involved in case processing operations. Managers must constantly assess the technical competence of the employees to perform their assigned tasks, and must establish a training program to increase the skills of both old and new employees. Quality control and production reports can reveal training needs. Also, transfer and promotion of employees to new positions and the hiring of new employees will usually necessitate training. Finally, training is needed to refresh technical competence.

A good example of the use of training is illustrated by the San Bernardino County IV-D program in California. A two-week intensive training program is scheduled for each new Child Support Officer and Investigator, followed by a six-month "hands on" training program. The attorneys in the program also brief the judges who handle child support cases on IV-D procedures.

The knowledge gained from overall training increases motivation, gives employees better awareness of where they fit into the total case processing system, and improves technical expertise. Employees become more aware of how their work affects work in other units or other employees within the same unit. As a result, case processing can be significantly improved throughout the system.

Implementation Strategy

- Establish a training coordinator to direct and develop a comprehensive training and orientation program. The coordinator should assess overall training needs, research the availability of training resources, and plan and coordinate the training activity. Line employees may be used as trainers. Serving as instructors in training projects would tap their potential for growth as well as help to meet training needs.

- Incorporate best practices into the training agenda as they are documented through quality control feedback.

- Elicit suggestions from employees for training topics to be included in the training agenda.

COORDINATING CASE PROCESSING ACTIVITIES INVOLVING MULTIPLE COMPONENTS

In many IV-D programs there are multiple components, usually under different political divisions, responsible for different case processing functions and activities. For example, AFDC, court clerks, States' attorneys, sheriffs, etc. may be involved in the process. Unless prevented by special positive efforts by key decision makers within all of the components, these multiple components often lead to uncoordinated and fragmented case processing.

Figure 2 illustrates the myriad patterns of information exchange required among units in a program of multiple components. In this example, a State IV-A Unit is responsible for referrals to a district IV-D unit which is responsible for locate and establishment. The State IV-D unit is responsible for overall administration. The City Circuit Attorney's Office is responsible for recordation, collection and distribution of payments. Other units involved are the courts for hearings on paternity and support orders, and the Sheriff's Office for warrants and summons. Although all of these components perform specific functions, their work is interdependent to the extent that all of their efforts are necessary to effect a complete case processing system. Because of this interdependence, it is vitally important that the activities of all the components be coordinated to achieve harmonious interaction and move the cases through the process in an efficient manner. Coordination is difficult because each component tends to look within itself rather than at the case processing systems as a whole and the final objective that must be reached.

An ideal solution to this problem is to designate one manager to be in charge of coordinating the activities among these components. Since this is rarely feasible, the key decision makers should meet regularly to discuss and solve the problems caused by fragmented activity and try to establish the means for coordinated case processing among all the components.

Managers can discuss many issues in establishing a coordinated approach. The following are some (methods) that should be pursued. These include:

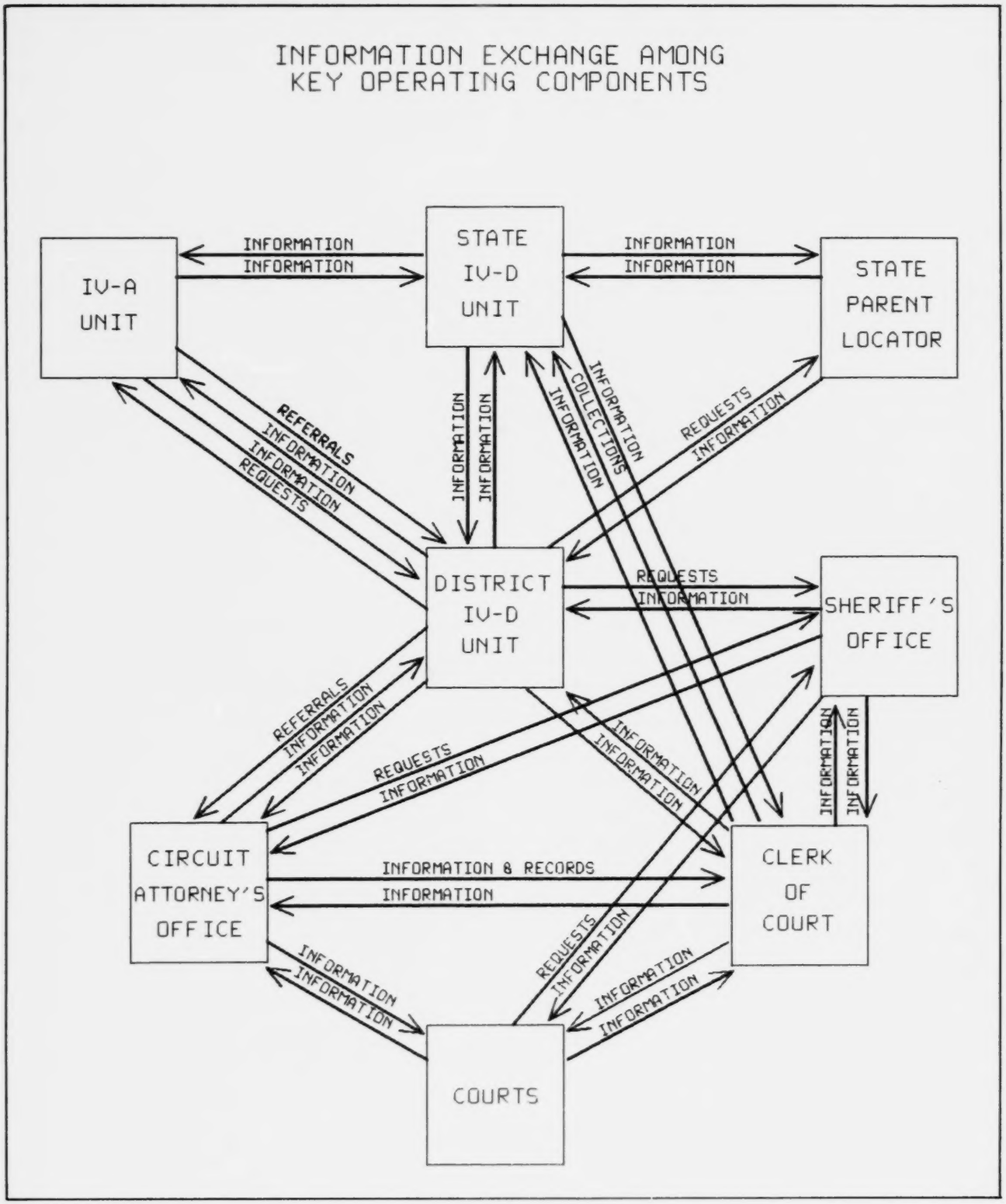

INFORMATION EXCHANGE AMONG
KEY OPERATING COMPONENTS
IV-A UNIT
STATE IV-D UNIT
STATE PARENT LOCATOR
DISTRICT IV-D UNIT
SHERIFF'S OFFICE
CIRCUIT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
CLERK OF COURT
COURTS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
REFERRALS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
REQUESTS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
COLLECTIONS
INFORMATION
REQUESTS
INFORMATION
REQUESTS
INFORMATION
REFERRALS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
REQUESTS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION & RECORDS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
REQUESTS
INFORMATION
INFORMATION
INFORMATION

FIGURE 2

- Duplicate files should be eliminated where possible because creating new files each time a case enters a new component may be inefficient utilization of resources.

- Common case identifiers, such as case file numbers and the name under which the file is set up, should be identical among components and units when possible to facilitate information exchange. If not possible, there should be a cross reference system to facilitate information sharing among the components concerning the cases. A data base, or cross index files, and other similar methods for sharing information and case tracking throughout the system are necessary for an efficient case tracking system.

- Common forms and documents among the various components and units, where feasible, help reduce costs and confusion among employees if staff transfers occur among units. An analysis of the forms may reveal duplication among components which could be eliminated.

- Information exchange among components and operating units responsible for IV-D functions is essential to expedite case processing. Included are departments that perform IV-D activities but have other responsibilities not related to IV-D, such as sheriffs' departments, clerks of court units, and the court system. For example, if one IV-D unit, such as a State IV-D office, is responsible for delinquency monitoring, it must depend upon information received from the responsible collections unit, such as a clerk of court which may be under city or county jurisdiction. Another example is a county prosecutor's office depending upon information from a State IV-D office which passes referrals to them for order establishment.

The State IV-D program in Illinois illustrates information exchange among components through a centralized automated system. The Illinois program is State administered with contractual agreements with several components to complete all of the functions of IV-D case processing. The State performs intake and locate, but has contracts with the State Attorney's Office for establishment and

enforcement, and with the Clerk of the Circuit Court for court case processing, collections, distribution and some monitoring. A purchase of services contract with the sheriff's office is used for service of process. Components have on-line input capability to the State central automated system and provide information to the system relative to case status. The State provides a central inquiry service for incoming telephone and walk-in inquiries and which transfers calls on cases pending in other components.

Resolution of these issues and others important to coordination of case processing should improve interaction among the components, thereby leading to more efficient and effective case processing.

CHAPTER THREE

ELEMENTS WHICH EXPEDITE CASE PROCESSING

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we discuss some of the elements we have found to be important for expedited processing of cases through all of the IV-D functions of intake, locate, establishment, financial assessment, collections and enforcement. Our objectives for this section are to provide an understanding of these important elements, their benefits to case processing, and how to make them a part of your system. The primary source of the information and examples in this section are drawn from experiences and successful techniques of IV-D jurisdictions. The following elements are discussed separately:

- o Work Simplification
- o Uniform and Reliable Tickler Systems
- o Maximum Utilization of Personnel for Caseload Responsibilities
- o Case Prioritization

WORK SIMPLIFICATION

Work simplification is a way of improving the step-by-step methods of performing work. It consists of eliminating unnecessary tasks and streamlining the remaining responsibilities. It may also involve installation of a complete new case processing system. The objectives of work simplification are to reduce processing time from start to finish for completing each operation in case processing, and to reduce unnecessary duplication which causes a wasteful utilization of resources.

The first step in work simplification is to identify operations which can be eliminated, combined, changed, or improved. First, draw a workflow diagram of the

complete operation. In this way, you can identify operations that have delays, bottlenecks, etc., and which provide the greatest potential for simplification and improvement. Some examples of operations with such potential for work simplification in the Child Support Enforcement program are:

- The intake referral process from IV-A to IV-D (because the flow of referrals may not be steady or timely). In the St. Louis, Missouri IV-D program, the intake process has been streamlined by establishing a screening unit to receive all referrals from IV-A. This unit also does the preliminary locate via computer interface with the Departments of Motor Vehicles, Social Services and Economic Security. The cases are then prioritized and input into the IV-D computer system. Cases with high success priority potential are passed to the work units within 24 hours of receipt from IV-A.

- Utilization of locate resources (because of delays and possible concurrent activities). The example of St. Louis is also cited here because the locate effort is started early in case processing before the cases reach the casework units. This prompt effort greatly speeds up case processing since the casework units receive the cases, and they can immediately start efforts to contact the absent parent.

- Processing cases for action in court (because there are frequent delays and time limitations involved). Many IV-D jurisdictions use paralegals to expedite processing of court cases and to relieve attorneys of routine matters. Additionally, one of the primary responsibilities of paralegals is to provide absent parents a final opportunity to work out agreements for paying child support before appearing in court. This function is very important because it saves court time and speeds case processing.

  Vermont has an automated system which provides online payment histories. These histories allow for greater flexibility in court scheduling and for online profile data on each absent parent. Before the system was

in place it took a week to develop a payment history for an absent parent and payment histories had to be requested one week before all hearings.

- In Vermont, a Cash Receipts Unit receives all established orders and inputs them into the computer. It receives the checks from the APs and inputs the amount into the computer system. The computer generates reports by the next day for comparison of payments input. After reconciliation with printouts, deposits are made to the bank.

  This approach of combining related tasks within one unit such as input of orders, receipts and reconciliation of payments leads to greater efficiency.

Identifying Operations For Work Simplification Through Flowcharting

The following section briefly describes one useful method for graphically depicting the flow of cases through the case processing and management system (Activity 1). In addition, Activity 2 will assist you in analyzing the data obtained from your flowchart and identifying operations for work simplification.

Seeing the Whole Picture--FLOWCHARTING

To identify operations for work simplification, you need to examine the flow of cases throughout processing modes. The graphic way of performing this step is to flowchart the current case processing system. Flowcharting is a useful method for outlining existing and or proposed procedural activities. It is used to identify and examine major case processing activities. Using a few symbols, you can represent the flow of resources (documents, materials, information and people) within your organization. Flowcharting shows:

- How each case procedure is set-up;

- Who performs each task;

- o The physical movement of the document; and

- o What resources are used.

The flowchart will also help you identify duplication of effort, unnecessary steps, excessive supervisory reviews, excessive movement of paper, and bottlenecks and delays. Thus, you can obtain an accurate and comprehensive picture of your case processing and case management system. Although standard flowchart symbols are described in this workbook, you may use any method or symbol for illustrating your caseflow. The important point is that you know what the symbols mean.

Flowchart Symbols

OPERATION

An operation is where or when something is done. Any change in an object--its parts, its position, or its characteristics--represents an operation. Also, an operation occurs when information is given or received, or when planning or calculating takes place.

Examples of Operation are:

- Updating AP address on the computer terminal;
- Signing the paternity questionnaire;
- Typing a wage assignment; and
- Telephoning custodial parent.

MOVEMENT

Movement occurs when an object is moved from one person to another, or when an object moves from one work station (or storage) to another.

Examples of Movement are:

- A IV-D application given to the locate caseworker from the intake unit;
- If applicable, electronic transfer of the IV-D application from IV-A;
- A garnishment statement sent to the bank; and
- A closed case being returned to the file.

REVIEW

A review occurs when an object is examined, checked, or evaluated for identification, quality or quantity.

Examples of Review are:

- Reviewing the delinquency printout;
- Reviewing the IV-D application;
- Reviewing the case file by Supervisor before submittal to prosecuting attorney; and
- Reviewing the file by Attorney prior to appearance in court.

FILE

Storage occurs when an object is retained and protected against unauthorized removal, or when stored in a file.

Examples of Storage are:

- Case information stored in a computer file;
- Physical records filed by last name of AP; and
- Maintaining the payment history on a computer file.

DECISION

A decision occurs when two or more alternatives are possible.

Examples of Decision are:

- Is address available from DMV Computer System (Yes or No);
- AP address known (Yes or No);
- AP employer known (Yes or No);
- Voluntary Stipulation (Yes or No);
- Paternity established (Yes or No); and
- AP Delinquent (Yes or No).

How To Use The Flowchart Symbols

Once you are familiar with each type of flowchart symbol, the next step is to outline your case processing system. To do this, use the appropriate symbols to represent each case processing activity. Remember to consider what operations, movements, reviews, files, and decisions occur as a result of cases moving through intake, locate, establishing paternity, establishing orders, enforcement and collections/distribution. Figures 3-7 provide you with sample flowcharts which illustrate how a Child Support office might process a case through each of those functions. Notice how each symbol and its corresponding description provides a detailed step-by-step account of each process (intake, locate, etc.)

ACTIVITY I: FLOWCHARTING YOUR ORGANIZATION

Use the space provided (after each sample figure) to flowchart the caseflow in your office (through intake, locate, establishing paternity, establishing orders, enforcement and collections/distributions.) Remember, provide a brief description to identify what type of operation, movement, review, file or decision each symbol represents. Once you have completed your flowchart, use sample criteria to develop timeframes for completing those case processing activities. You will then have sufficient information to analyze your caseflow. Analyzing Your Flowchart (Activity 2) will provide additional guidance in conducting your analysis.

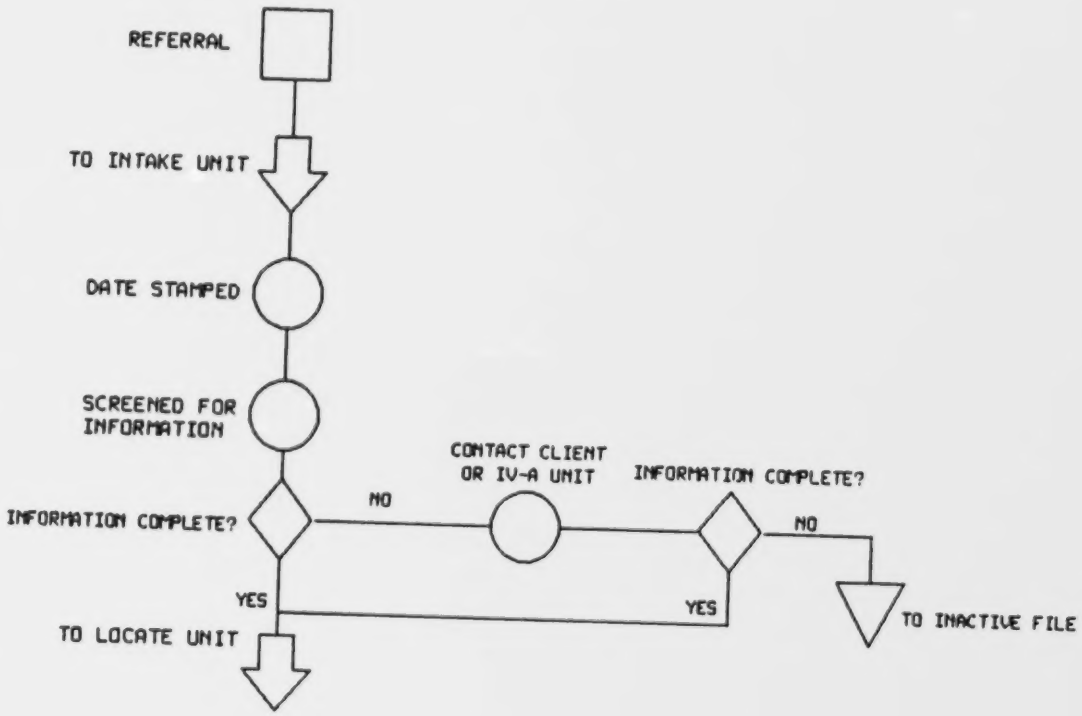

INTAKE
REFERRAL
TO INTAKE UNIT
DATE STAMPED
SCREENED FOR INFORMATION
INFORMATION COMPLETE?
NO
CONTACT CLIENT OR IV-A UNIT
INFORMATION COMPLETE?
NO
YES
YES
TO LOCATE UNIT
TO INACTIVE FILE

FIGURE 3

FLOWCHART - INTAKE

LOCATE

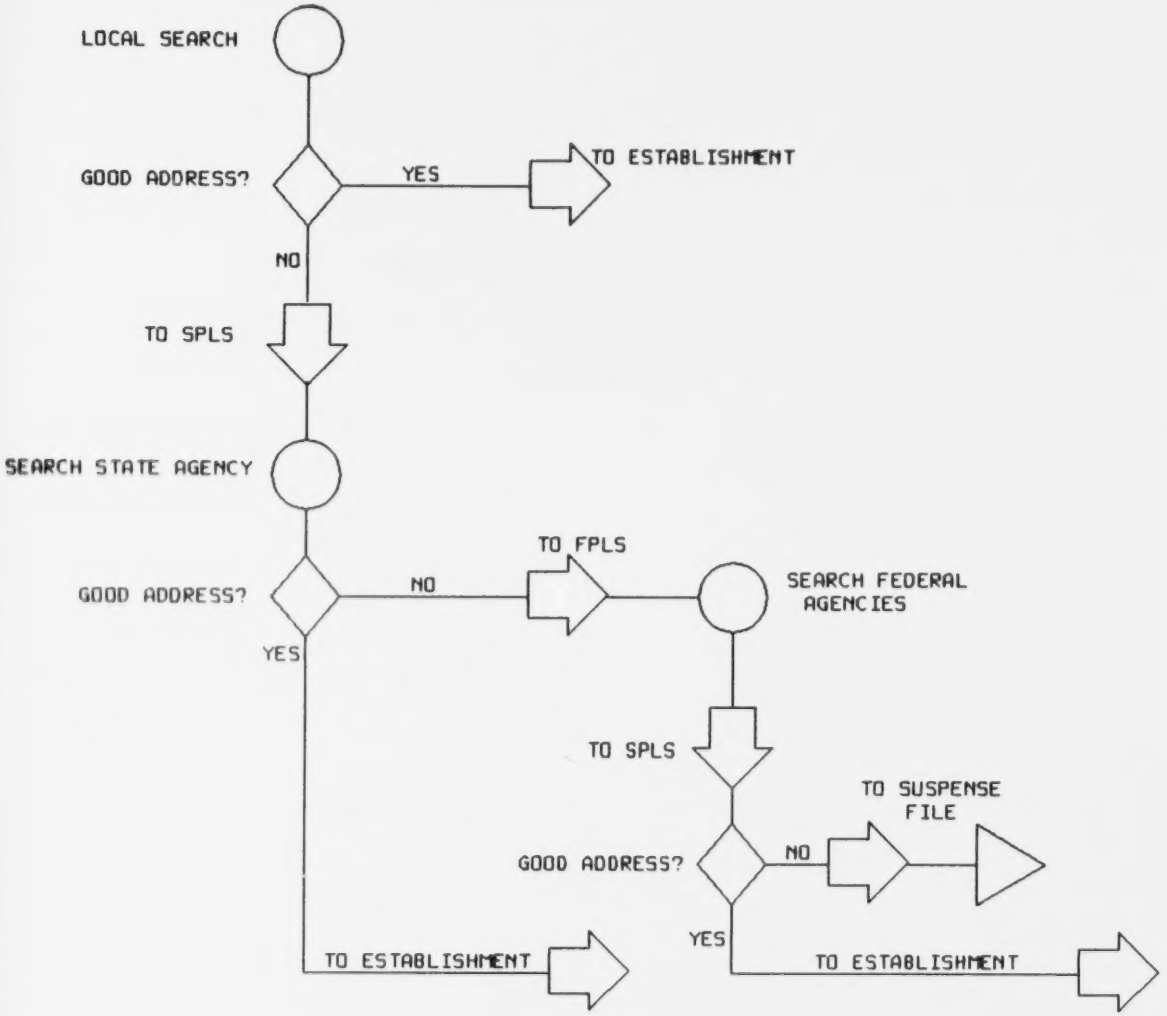


FIGURE 4

FLOWCHART - LOCATE

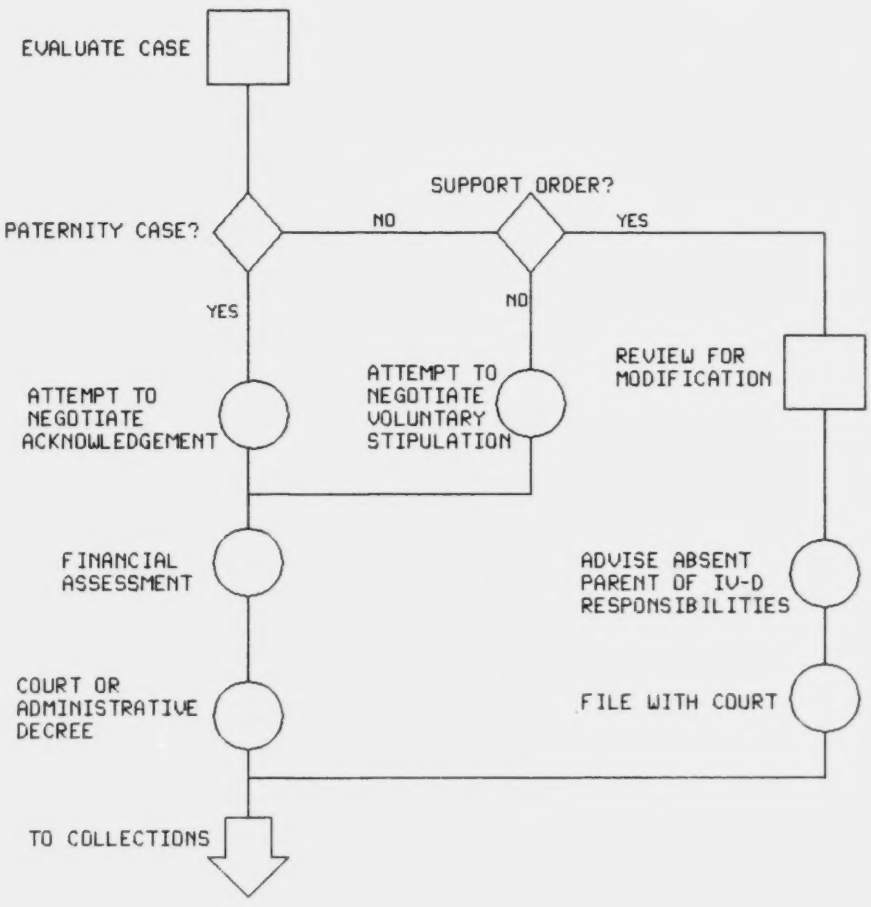

ESTABLISHMENT
EVALUATE CASE
SUPPORT ORDER?
PATERNITY CASE?
NO
YES
YES
NO
REVIEW FOR MODIFICATION
ATTEMPT TO NEGOTIATE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
ATTEMPT TO NEGOTIATE VOLUNTARY STIPULATION
FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT
ADVISE ABSENT PARENT OF IV-D RESPONSIBILITIES
COURT OR ADMINISTRATIVE DECREE
FILE WITH COURT
TO COLLECTIONS

FIGURE 5

FLOWCHART - ESTABLISHMENT

ENFORCEMENT

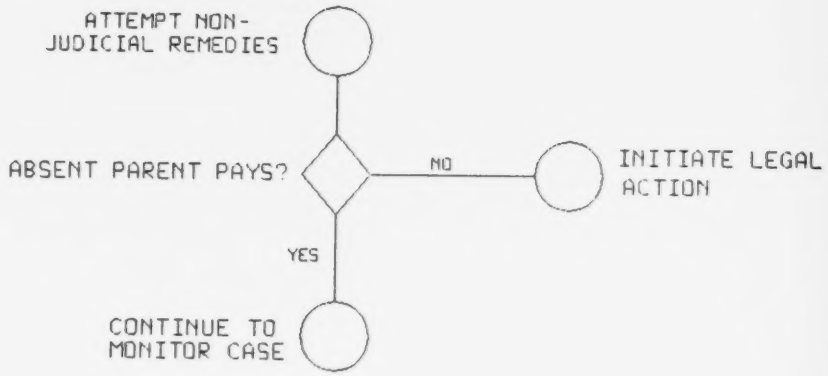


FIGURE 6

FLOWCHART - ENFORCEMENT

COLLECTIONS

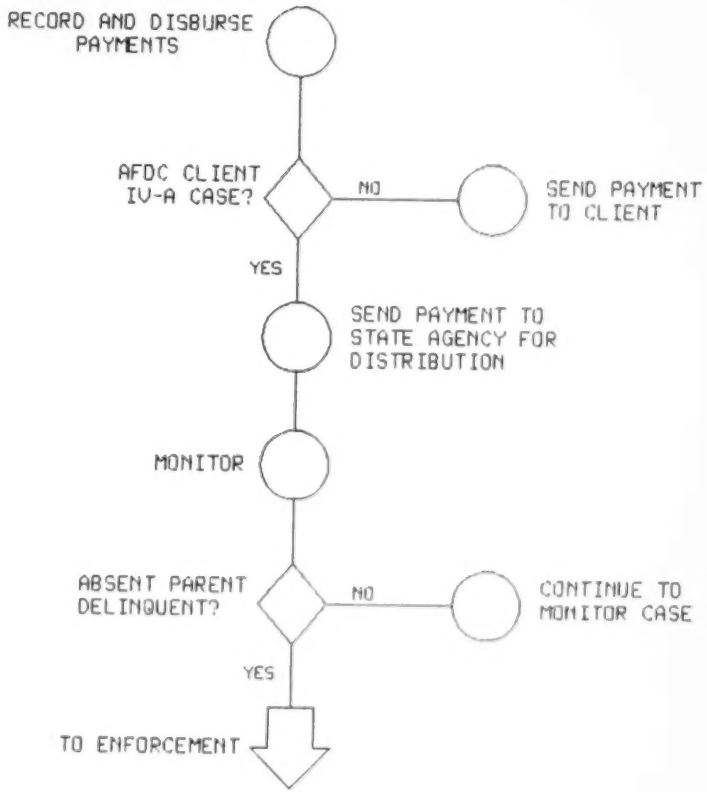


FIGURE 7

FLOWCHART - COLLECTIONS

ACTIVITY 2: ANALYZING YOUR FLOWCHART

After completing flowcharts which outline your case system, the next step is to review each one for inconsistencies, delays and unnecessary activities. As a result, you and your staff will have useful information with which to develop new methods for performing case processing and management activities. The purpose of flowcharting is to assist you in analyzing your current case processing system, identifying work operations for simplification, and in developing new work methods.

A. Use the workflow diagram to answer several basic questions about activities within each function.

1. How many steps are required to complete case processing within each IV-D function?
2. Are referrals delayed in getting to the units for processing?
3. What is done within each step of your case processing system?
4. Where is it done?
5. When is it done?
6. Who does it?
7. How is it accomplished?
8. How much time is required to complete each step and to refer cases to the next unit for additional processing?

As a result, you may identify activities which can be eliminated, combined, changed or improved, such as:

- The intake referral process from IV-A to IV-D (because the flow of referrals may not be steady).
- Processing cases for action in court (because there are frequent delays and time limitations involved).
- Utilization of locate resources (because of delays and possible concurrent activities).

- o Maintenance of case records (because of tendency to keep more or less information than is necessary).
- o Payment processing (because of security and time limitations).

Some examples of activities which provide the greatest potential for simplification and methods of improvement include: work activities with delays, bottlenecks, frequent errors, chronic overtime, and missed deadlines.

B. If you have identified any inconsistencies, delays or unnecessary case processing activities, then the next step is to consider alternative work methods. Remember, more than one method may be available for accomplishing work goals. The following questions will assist you in considering the alternatives.

1. Why is it done at all?
2. Why is it done there?
3. Why is it done then?
4. Why does this person do it?
5. Why is it done this way?

In considering alternative methods, you may want to target change in the following areas:

- o Distribution of work
- o Quality review checks
- o Forms development and improvement
- o Workflow
- o Files maintenance

C. If you decide a new method of performing work activities is needed, the next step is to develop new work methods. The following questions will assist you in this task.

1. How else could the task be performed to accomplish the same result?

2. Where else could it be done?
3. At what other time could it be done?
4. Who else could do it?
5. In what other way could it be done?

As a result, you may find it necessary to:

- o Eliminate unnecessary work activities.
- o Combine two related work activities so they are performed at the same time.
- o Change the sequence of work activities.
- o Simplify work activities to be productive, smooth flowing and simple.

D. If new methods are developed, complete a new flowchart for each case processing function, listing all its activities. Then compare the number of steps required by your new case processing system to the number of steps required prior to work simplification. If the method is simpler, you will find a substantial decrease in the number of steps required to accomplish case processing.

UNIFORM AND RELIABLE TICKLER SYSTEMS

Cases rarely complete the processing cycle without the need for follow-up activity. Thus, some method should be developed to alert the caseworker that some additional action should be taken. A tickler system is a system that alerts operations personnel and management to take timely follow-up actions on routine case processing and management actions. Tickler systems are essential to efficient and effective case processing.

The tickler system should be uniform and reliable for all units that process the same types of cases. For example, if there are several units all involved in delinquency monitoring, all workers reponsible for monitoring should have the same system. A uniform and reliable system will facilitate learning the system and will enable management to shift personnel within the organization more easily. Also, management can better assess the effectiveness of the system.

Listed below are some categories of cases which require tickler systems:

1. Awaiting requested information, e.g., a letter to a IV-A client regarding the absent parent.

2. Awaiting further documentation, e.g., a copy of a prior order or divorce decree.

3. In suspense, diaried for review pending occurrence of certain events.

4. Files sent to other components for further processing, e.g., referrals to legal components for court actions, or sanction requests to IV-A.

5. Under a monitoring system for payments on obligations.

Tickler systems may be manual or automated. Good examples of manual and automated systems are those in Connecticut, and in Tavares, Florida.

In Connecticut, follow-up actions on cases are controlled by annotating personal logs in the "date and action" column when actions on cases are taken. Follow-up actions on cases are prompted during reviews of the logs; making it unnecessary to pull and review all the files. Cases held in suspense and cases with obligations are recorded on review cards and annotated with review dates. The cards are put in central files and are controlled by clerical personnel. When the review dates mature, the clerks pull the cases from files and give them to the case workers for actions.

The Tavares, Florida, IV-D office uses microcomputers to aid in case-processing tickler control. Each staff member can retrieve the data base which contains appointment and follow-up dates. Also, payments are automatically monitored by the system. When the first payment is missed, the system automatically sends a warning letter. If a second payment is missed, the system automatically prepares a referral to the attorney handling enforcement, sends the absent parent's employer a request for employment verification, and suspends monitoring action until the system is told to do otherwise. The system can be overridden by the investigator who can initiate wage withholding or take other action as appropriate.

In setting up or attempting to improve the tickler control system for your office, the following steps are important:

1. Know the personnel directly responsibility for each case processing activity.

2. Analyze the case flow to determine which cases are likely to need follow- up actions and what follow- up actions will be used.

3. Determine what time frames should be established for the follow- up actions. The time frames should be based upon experience, processing requirements and other known factors such as mail time.

4. Select the proper persons to control the tickler system and to obtain case file data for follow- up actions. It is preferable to have clerks controlling the tickler system so that technical employees can continue with the technical actions needed to process cases.

5. Develop, issue and discuss written guidelines for the system.

6. Periodically evaluate the system and make any changes needed to enhance effectiveness.

ACTIVITY 3: DEVELOPING A TICKLER SYSTEM

Activity 3 contains worksheets for the previously mentioned categories which require tickler systems:

- Cases awaiting requested information
- Cases awaiting requested documentation
- Cases held in suspense
- Cases referred to other components
- Cases monitored for payments.

The worksheets offer a format to categorize and list steps of your case processing systems that require follow- up activity with the time frames and the desired follow-up actions. If any of these categories are not relevant for your system, you may eliminate them and/or substitute others. Additional pertinent categories may also be added.

After the tickler controls have been established, the employees should be informed of the tickler system. Controls should be established for feedback on the use of the system so that any necessary corrective action can be taken, such as altering the system or counseling employees. (See the discussion on developing a procedures manual in Chapter Two of this guide and the discussion on developing a quality control system in Chapter Four.)

ACTIVITY 3 DEVELOPING A TICKLER SYSTEM

WORKSHEET 1 CASES AWAITING REQUESTED INFORMATION

	CASE ACTIVITY	TIME FRAMES	FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY
EXAMPLE	LETTER SENT TO CLIENT TO CONTACT IV-D	10 DAYS	SANCTION TO IV-A
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

ACTIVITY 3 DEVELOPING A TICKLER SYSTEM

WORKSHEET 2 CASES AWAITING REQUESTED DOCUMENTATION

	CASE ACTIVITY	TIME FRAMES	FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY
EXAMPLE	REQUEST SENT FOR A COPY OF A PRIOR ORDER	2 WEEKS	PERSONAL VISIT TO THE COURT HOUSE
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

ACTIVITY 3 DEVELOPING A TICKLER SYSTEM

WORKSHEET 3 CASES IN SUSPENSE

	CASE ACTIVITY	TIME FRAMES	FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY
EXAMPLE	CASE IN WHICH THE AP IS INCARCERATED	RELEASE DATE	RELOCATE AP
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

ACTIVITY 3 DEVELOPING A TICKLER SYSTEM

WORKSHEET 4 CASES REFERRED TO OTHER COMPONENTS

	CASE ACTIVITY	TIME FRAMES	FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY
EXAMPLE	CASES SENT TO THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE FOR LEGAL ACTION	30 DAYS	CONTACT LIASON PERSON IN PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

ACTIVITY 3 DEVELOPING A TICKLER SYSTEM

WORKSHEET 5 CASES MONITORED FOR PAYMENTS

	CASE ACTIVITY	TIME FRAMES	FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY
EXAMPLE	PAYMENT DUE ON OBLIGATION	30 DAYS	WAGE ASSIGNMENT
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

MAXIMUM UTILIZATION OF PERSONNEL FOR CASELOAD RESPONSIBILITIES

Case processing delays often occur because a support or a clerical employee forwards a case to a technical employee for processing activities which can be performed at a lower level. For example, in many IV-D offices the clerks in an intake unit merely screen the incoming referrals, set up the case file, and send the cases to higher level technical employees to locate the absent parent and determine priority status. If guidelines are made available, clerical staff can perform routine activities. Moving case processing responsibility down to the lowest level not only reduces multiple handling of cases but also increases case processing efficiency by saving time and by more effectively utilizing staff resources.

The Maine Child Support program--a State administered, centralized organization--uses this technique. Clerks in the central office do all of the work on the cases including locate before the cases are sent to technical personnel called "agents" who present hearings under the State's administrative process. Using "agents" in the administrative process reduces the need for attorneys in the program. The few attorneys in the program handle cases which go to court such as paternity cases.

In the Washington State program, the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office handles the URESA and paternity cases for the county. Paralegals monitor payment records and are responsible for initiating enforcement actions in delinquent cases (i.e., contempt proceedings and wage assignments). This use of paralegals saves valuable attorney time which can be used in other more essential legal matters. The principle of moving responsibility down can apply to any organization or component.

Management must decide where to place responsibility based on personnel resources such as availability, experience, abilities and knowledge. In addition, management must consider the possibility of a change in the job description and/or a change in classification.

To assist in making decisions as to where responsibilities should be placed, management should ask some of the following questions:

1. What knowledge, skills and abilities are required to perform this activity?

2. Do clerical or support employees have the time, knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform the activity in question?

3. Can clerical or support employees be adequately trained to handle the additional activity?

4. Is the activity clerical, technical, managerial or legal?

5. What impact would there be on the current workflow if certain activities were removed to lower levels?

6. What impact would there be on staffing requirements if changes in case processing responsibilities were made?

7. How else could higher level personnel be employed effectively if tasks are reassigned to lower level personnel?

CASE PRIORITIZATION

Case prioritization involves the review of cases against an objective set of criteria to determine the order in which cases should be worked. Prioritizing cases so that those with greater potential for successful resolution are worked before ones of lesser potential is a good management practice that should increase collections. Successful resolution of a case results in obtaining an enforceable order and receiving payments on that order. However, when collections alone become the sole factor for working a case, more difficult cases--paternity cases for example--are seldom worked or at least are of a very low priority. To yield more equity in processing cases, the Federal Regulations revised October 1, 1984, provide guidelines and mandates for States to follow in establishing case prioritization systems even though they allow States the flexibility to develop their own criteria. A major point of the regulation is that States must not use the amount of collection potential as the sole factor in developing success indicators for the criteria (e.g., non-AFDC, URESA and AFDC), but must include methods for processing all classes of cases. Prioritization has the following benefits:

- Management becomes more involved in case processing by developing criteria by which to prioritize cases.

- Resources can be applied in a manner that brings a faster return for the effort made.

- The case processing system is streamlined by having uniform procedures.

- Both management and operations personnel gain more control and awareness of the caseload through the case assessments necessary for prioritization.

In developing criteria, a manager should consider those factors that have proven reliable in the past as leading to successful resolution of cases. Some examples of success indicators are the following:

- Case has a prior support order.

- o Current information is available on the absent parent. The more complete this information is, the higher priority a case will have.

- o Evidence is available to prove paternity.

- o Absent parent has a history of voluntary support payments.

- o Absent parent has steady employment.

States or local IV-D agencies can develop success indicators by considering each IV-D function that must be performed on the case and what is necessary to complete that function. Cases can then be prioritized based upon the total number and type of indicators known about the cases that will lead to successful resolution of the cases. This concept of prioritization is evident in the St. Louis County IV-D program in the State of Missouri. A prioritization scheme was developed for each of the functions of intake, locate-establishment, locate-enforcement, order establishment and enforcement.

In the intake function, the screeners prioritize the cases into three priority codes. Codes 1 and 2 are workable cases and code 3 cases have little or no potential for successful resolution. Prioritization for the locate function is broken down into two categories: locate to establish orders and locate for enforcement of orders. Cases are prioritized within locate-establishment based upon the successful resolution of locating the absent parent. Cases are prioritized within locate-enforcement based upon the successful resolution of finding assets of the absent parent.

The ranking of cases in the establishment function is based upon the successful resolution of obtaining an enforceable order and the ranking of cases in the enforcement function is based upon the successful resolution of obtaining current payments on the orders.

In the prioritization of cases, it should be remembered that the priority ranking of

cases may change as they are being processed because circumstances may change and new information about the cases may be uncovered. For example, an absent parent who was employed at the time of intake may later quit his job and move to an unknown address. Case prioritization is an ongoing process throughout the case processing cycle. Managers must be aware of this in developing case prioritization procedures and provide the capability to modify their systems according to case potential.

Also, in the development process a means for notifying applicants that the information provided initially or subsequently could affect the priority ranking of their cases should be included. This should help to motivate them to try to obtain and to provide necessary information to process their cases to IV-D. Let us examine one method you may want to use when developing a scheme for priority action.

DEVELOPING A PRIORITY SCHEME

STEP ONE

Determine for each essential function in the case processing cycle what action is needed to complete that function.

EXAMPLE:

Function	Need
Locate	1. Verify current address of AP if presented
	2. Search local and State/Federal resources if address of AP is not presented
Paternity Establishment	1. Attempt to obtain an acknowledgement
	2. Obtain statements from mother and other corroborative evidence
	3. Obtain other evidence of paternity i.e., birth certificates, blood test, etc.
	4. Obtain court determination
Order Establishment	1. Obtain copy of any prior order
	2. Attempt to obtain agreement or voluntary stipulations
	3. Obtain court determination
Collection/Enforcement	1. Receive and monitor payments
	2. Attempt voluntary agreements to pay delinquencies and arrearages
	3. Use administrative/legal techniques or court action

STEP TWO

Determine success indicators based upon case processing experience. The following examples provide some indicators that can be considered most likely to lead to success in developing each essential function. However, the indicators developed for your office may be entirely different.

EXAMPLE:

Function	Success Indicator In Order of Rank
Locate	1. Current address available and verifiable
	2. Name and address of employer available
	3. Social Security number of AP available
Paternity Establishment	1. Acknowledgement by AP
	2. Evidence of paternity available
	3. Cooperative client
Order Establishment	1. Prior existing order
	2. Voluntary stipulations secured
	3. History of voluntary payments
Enforcement/Collections	1. AP currently employed
	2. AP has real or personal property
	3. 3 months or less delinquent (not employed and has no property.)

STEP THREE

Develop guidelines for priority action. Each success indicator is given a weight based upon importance and the weights of each indicator in the case are totaled to provide the caseworker a guide on how to prioritize the cases being worked.

For each function the weights are as follows:

Indicator #	Weight
1	3
2	2
3	1

During case processing two cases have the following indicators.

CASE #1		CASE #2	
INDICATOR	WEIGHT	INDICATOR	WEIGHT
1. Current Address	3	1. Prior Order	3
2. Evidence of Paternity	2	2. History of Payments	3
TOTAL	5	TOTAL	6

Case #2 would be worked prior to case #1 because case #2 has a higher weight total.

CHAPTER FOUR

ELEMENTS OF CASELOAD MANAGEMENT WHICH ENHANCE CASE PROCESSING

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we define caseload management as an integral part of case processing. Also, we explain some of the important elements of caseload management that are essential to effective case processing. The elements covered in these sections are:

- Case Accountability
- Quality Control
- Quantitative Control
- IV-A/IV-D Interface
- Case Files Management

Case accountability is an important element of caseload management because it enables managers to assess how well their systems are processing all incoming cases to the end point of collections. This section provides a simple technique to provide this perspective.

The quality and quantitative control sections provide a means for information gathering that is necessary for decision making relative to case processing.

IV-A/IV-D interface is extremely important because the majority of IV-D cases begin with a referral from AFDC. Thus, in processing IV-D cases, proper IV-A/IV-D interface mechanisms are needed for quality and control of case processing.

The last element discussed, files management, is essential to retrieve and store case files as well as to expedite case status/information requests.

DEFINITION OF CASELOAD MANAGEMENT

Caseload management is an overall system of controlling cases within the IV-D program. It provides the ability to track case status/information and accuracy as cases proceed through the processing stream and the ability to retrieve cases at any time. It addresses questions similar to the following:

- What cases are in the processing stream and where are they?
- What is the collection value for each case?
- Is there a costly backlog?

While the issues seem obvious, many IV-D programs today can give only a general answer. Yet, specific answers, about individual cases or groups of like cases are required. For example, inquiries about the status of various cases are received every day. How difficult is it to obtain information about individual cases? Deadlines set both externally and by program management, are reached daily for one activity or another. How many cases are being processed within the required time frame? How many cases are not accounted for in the system? How many cases with high dollar collection potential disappear into an unknown backlog to become uncollectible? What is the collection dollar potential for cases processed to enforcement last month (last quarter) versus actual collections received? What are the potential to actual collection rates for various groups of cases by group characteristics? How many cases need location? What type of cases? The focus of caseload management is to answer questions like these in an accurate, timely fashion and provide means to process cases more effectively.

NEED FOR CASELOAD MANAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP TO CASE PROCESSING

Effective management of any complex process requires a caseload management system or its equivalent. Such systems are found throughout industry and business. They are variously called production control systems, operational control systems, and/or process control systems. For example, giant automakers such as General Motors, Chrysler and Ford all use production and distribution control systems that keep their management and operations people informed about the status of individual cars from assembly at the factory to distribution and sale by the dealer. The number of units, their dollar value, and their position in the production and distribution and sales chain, are all routinely reported. Production capacity, personnel and finances are routinely managed through analysis of such information.

Similarly, in a paper-based business, such as insurance, case management systems are used to track individual insurance policies from initial application, through risk rating, premium setting, closing, to premium management and periodic review, via the insurance firm's own staff or through its field agent network. Again, management, sales and operations staff are provided and have access to routine information on the status of individual groups of policies, dollar values, premium payments, payouts, renewals, status changes, etc. Without such case management systems to track the policy units or "cases" that insurance firms deal with, no firm could long survive.

In short, examples of case management systems or their equivalents abound throughout business and industry as well as in the public sector. They are essential tools of effective management.

In a similar fashion, IV-D programs have a compelling need for effective case management systems. Tracking IV-D cases, by case group types, by dollar values of support amounts due, by location and collection status, and by other critical case descriptors or criteria, is as vital to effective IV-D program management as it is to private business and industry.

In some respects, particularly with growing caseloads and constant or shrinking workforces, it is even more imperative for IV-D programs as a means to making optimal use of limited resources. Hence, there should be little question of the need for an effective case management system. The principal questions are what is an effective system and how is one developed? The information in the following sections attempts to answer these questions.

CASE ACCOUNTABILITY

Every case received into IV-D should be accounted for and controlled to ensure efficient and effective case processing. Whether cases become inactive, closed or remain active, they should be accounted for throughout the processing cycle.

Active cases are those cases being worked to obtain an enforceable order or monitored to enforce payment of existing orders. Inactive cases are cases temporarily not being worked and are sometimes called "suspended" cases. Inactive cases are intentionally delayed in processing pending an expected change in circumstances, i.e. an absent parent incarcerated for a stated period. After the period of suspense, these cases go back into active status. Cases may be closed if circumstances render it impossible to obtain an enforceable order, i.e., death of the AP, or a judgment denying paternity.

Because cases may move in and out of different categories during processing, controls should be established to ensure accountability for all cases. Without strict accountability cases may drop out of active status without explanation or be prematurely suspended or closed simply because they are difficult cases. Accountability is important so that all the truly active cases are processed toward an enforceable order and so that payments will be made on that order.

All successful IV-D programs have a means for establishing caseload accountability whatever their different organizational structures. The Illinois program is State administered with contractual agreements with the Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court, States Attorneys Office and a purchase of services contract with the Sheriff's office. The State maintains certain functions such as intake and locate. The State's central automated system provides for sophisticated case tracking, delinquency monitoring, enforcement referral and ability to identify cases by aging parameters and unit of pending (0-90 days -- 90-120 days). Each unit is then accountable for tracking down cases exceeding certain age parameters.

In San Bernardino County, California, the District Attorney's Office administers the Child Support program which is responsible for locating absent parents, establishing and enforcing orders, and monitoring obligations. A central case index has been established which is available to the caseworkers on a video terminal. Basic information on every active case in the system is entered immediately into the index. A thirty (30) day payment history ledger (Delinquency List) is printed out for each child support officer's caseload each month. This list aids the caseworker in his regular caseload review and also serves as a cross check to ensure that no case with an established obligation falls out of the system.

In the Maine Child Support program, referrals from IV-A are forwarded to the central office where they are input into the IV-D computer system. The computer system allows for good case tracking and provides status reports of each stage of case processing. Each caseworker's caseload is printed out monthly with status information including absent parent payment information. This information also shows the cases in the development stage in the processing cycle.

Vermont also has an automated facility for case tracking. The computer generates status lists monthly.

The following steps can be taken by management to focus on accountability:

Step 1. For a stated period--based upon a normal processing cycle--record the number of cases received into and referred from each IV-D function.

Step 2. Record the number of cases at each function going into and out of inactive and closed categories.

Step 3. Record the number of cases resulting in orders.

Step 4. Record the number of orders upon which payments are made.

Step 5. Compute the percentage of cases resulting in orders and the number of cases on which payments are made.

The following example of a caseflow analysis and summary depicted in Figures 8 and 9 will help to illustrate the steps. Figure 8 presents an example of a caseflow analysis using Steps 1 through 4. Figure 9 provides a caseflow summary using Step 5.

Figure 8

This diagram shows the status of cases at each function. For June 1984, a IV-D office received 2,100 cases into intake. After screening, 840 cases were put into inactive and closed categories and 1,260 cases were referred to locate. The locate unit located 945 cases with 315 cases going into inactive and closed status. The 945 located cases were referred to establishment which resulted in 473 orders. Enforcement and collections resulted in 142 paying cases.

Figure 9

This diagram shows the percentage of cases being completed at each function. Also for June 1984, the office received only 23 orders for each 100 cases and collecting only on 7 for each 100 cases received.

This type of analysis and summary can alert management as to where to place the appropriate controls to account for the cases that are dropping out of the system. Management should institute controls which would give feedback on the types of cases dropping out and the reasons why. Corrective action should be taken to ensure that all cases that should be processed are processed.

CASEFLOW ANALYSIS BY FUNCTIONS

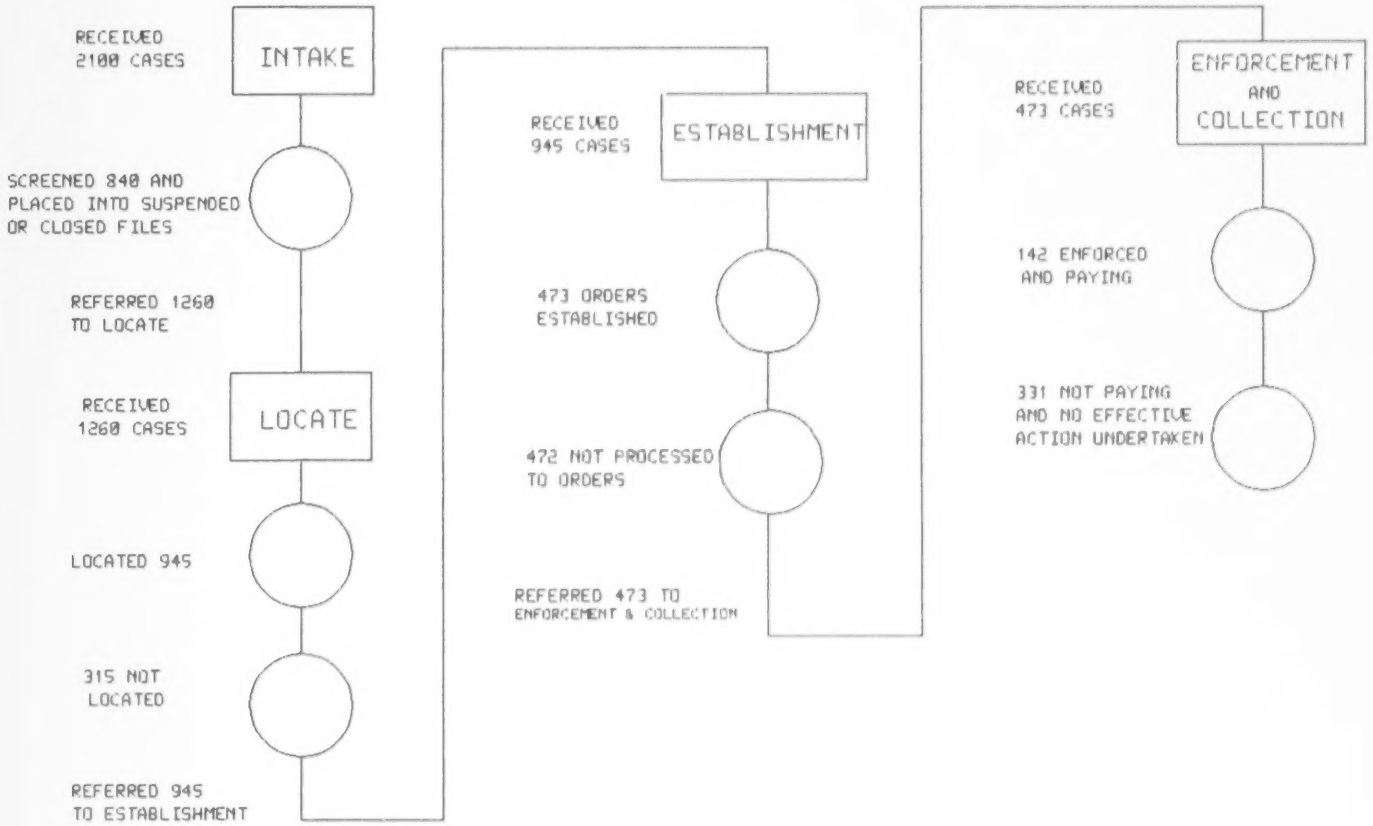


FIGURE 8

79

80

CASEFLOW SUMMARY - PERCENTAGES

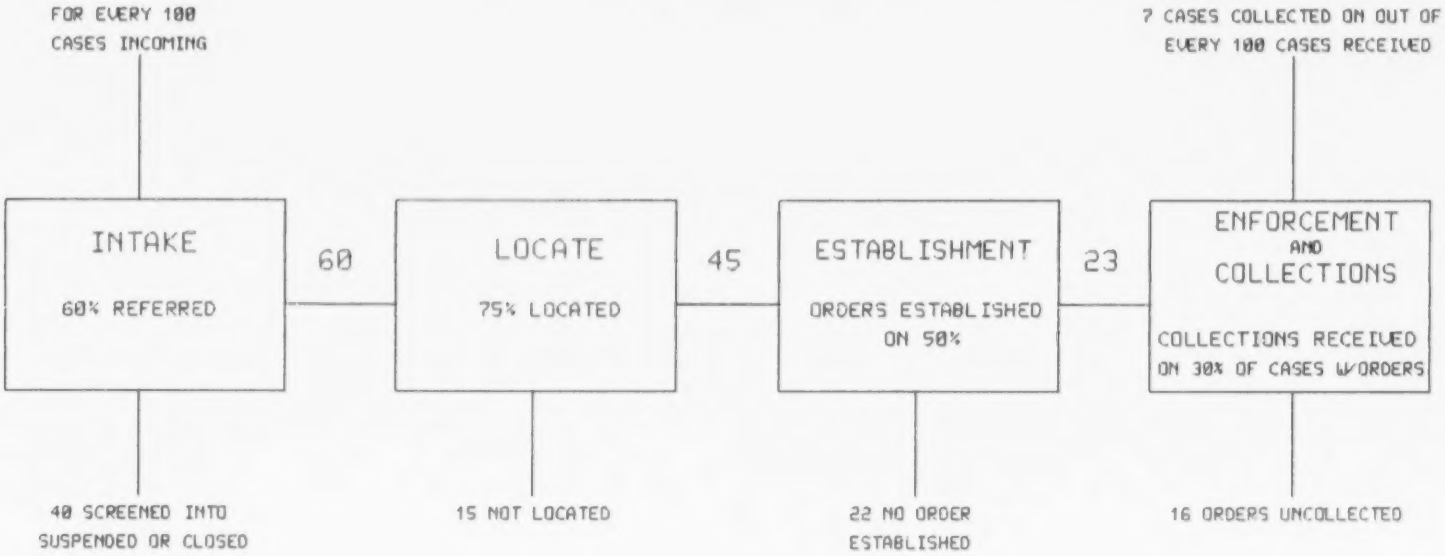


FIGURE 9

QUALITY CONTROL

An efficient and effective case processing system processes cases through the functions quickly and correctly. A quality control system which documents whether the cases are being processed according to expectations and feeds information to management for corrective action helps to assure a quality processing system. Feedback information as to whether cases are being properly documented, processed according to proper procedures, and processed within expected processing time frames gives management the information to take corrective action when needed. One method of establishing a quality control system involves the following steps:

- Setting standards for quality in case documentation and case processing times. Management must decide what are the minimum number of errors acceptable in case documentation and the maximum number of days acceptable to process cases from and to certain points in the processing cycle. The standards used in setting up the quality control system may start with the prevailing norms for documentation errors and processing times. The norms will improve with the proper execution of the quality control system.

- Selecting cases via a statistical random sampling procedure to measure the number of errors in documentation and the actual number of days of processing time. The measurement should be based on averages over a stated period.

- Comparing measured performance with the standard or norm to determine differences and trends. (See Example Figure 10 and 11).

- Determining if the differences are significant so that management can investigate for causes. Trends should also be investigated.

Quality Control Implementation

Setting standards for documentation and processing times--key areas in case processing--should be related to the goals and objectives of the organization. For example, if priority is being given to cases with orders for the purpose of increasing collections sooner, then a case processed without a copy of the prior order might be an error in a key area. Also, if the goal is to improve the locate efforts, then a key step to measure processing time might be the number of days required to exhaust all local sources for an address of the AP.

Using Random Sampling Procedures

It is rarely cost effective to check or review each and every case to measure quality. Scientific random sampling of cases will give a good approximation of the quality for the universe of cases. A 100 percent review is often neither as expedient as random sampling nor as accurate.

In order for the findings of the reviews done by random sampling to be representative of the universe of cases, it is essential that all cases in the universe have an equal chance of being selected. Managers, therefore, must use a little imagination in selecting cases for review. A method to use that would be practical and efficient for caseloads is systematic random sampling. The best way to define systematic random sampling is first to define simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is selecting units from a universe by random number tables or other devices which ensure that each item has an equal chance of selection. Systematic random sampling, on the other hand, is selecting units systematically from a universe but still making sure each item in the universe has an equal chance of selection. For example, suppose that in a universe of 500 cases you wish to pick 10 for reviews. The following steps should be taken:

1. Pick a skip interval by dividing the 500 cases by 10. This would result in every 50th case being selected for review.

2. Pick the starting point by selecting by simple random sampling the first case for review within the first grouping of 50. This gives each case an equal chance of being selected.

3. Pick every 50th case after the starting point of the first case picked in the first grouping of 50 cases.

4. Review the 10 cases under the criteria selected and make the findings or conclusions.

After the findings have been averaged for a given period, e.g., 6 months, the norms would be established which could be the basis for the standard initially. This initial standard would periodically change as changes in quality occur and subsequent measurements reveal different norms. Management emphasis upon quality with proper execution of the quality control system will cause the norms to improve as time passes.

After the standard or norm has been established, individual and unit averages should be periodically compared with the standard or norm to determine if there are significant differences. Management should determine what is significant based upon what the tolerance is for variance. If there are significant differences in performance, management should investigate for causes and take the necessary corrective action. A control chart should be constructed to show graphically the differences and should be prominently displayed. This could influence employees to perform better by appealing to their competitive instincts. Figure 10 is an example of a control chart measuring processing times for completion of cases. Figure 11 is an example of a control chart measuring case documentation errors.

Steps in Establishing a Quality Control Chart for Processing Times and Case Documentation

1. Select the best time interval for random selection of cases i.e., daily, weekly, monthly, etc.

2. Compute the norm based upon findings in the sample over a certain period. For case processing, the norm would represent average days processing time through key steps as identified by management. For case documentation, the norm would be based upon the average percentage of cases found to be defective, according to the criteria developed for case documentation. For example, the percentage of cases found to be defective would be averaged for a period of six months.

3. Set tolerance for deviation from the norm or standard which will signal and trigger management action. The upper tolerance level (UTL) is the point which signals management to investigate the causes for the performance substantially exceeding the norm. The lowest tolerance level (LTL), on the other hand, is the point which signals management to investigate the causes for the performance substantially falling below the norm or average. Management can arbitrarily set the UTL and LTL based upon experience and entering this information on the control chart graphically shows these variances. It is important to note that not all variances from the norm are indicative of a problem. Thus, management should only investigate variances when they differ significantly from the norm.

4. Construct the control chart and post it. Posting the chart will cause improvement in quality because it will focus the attention of employees on the quality level.

5. Use the chart as a means for acting on the signals of significant variations and trends to:
    - o Find causes,
    - o Remove bad causes, and
    - o Encourage good causes.

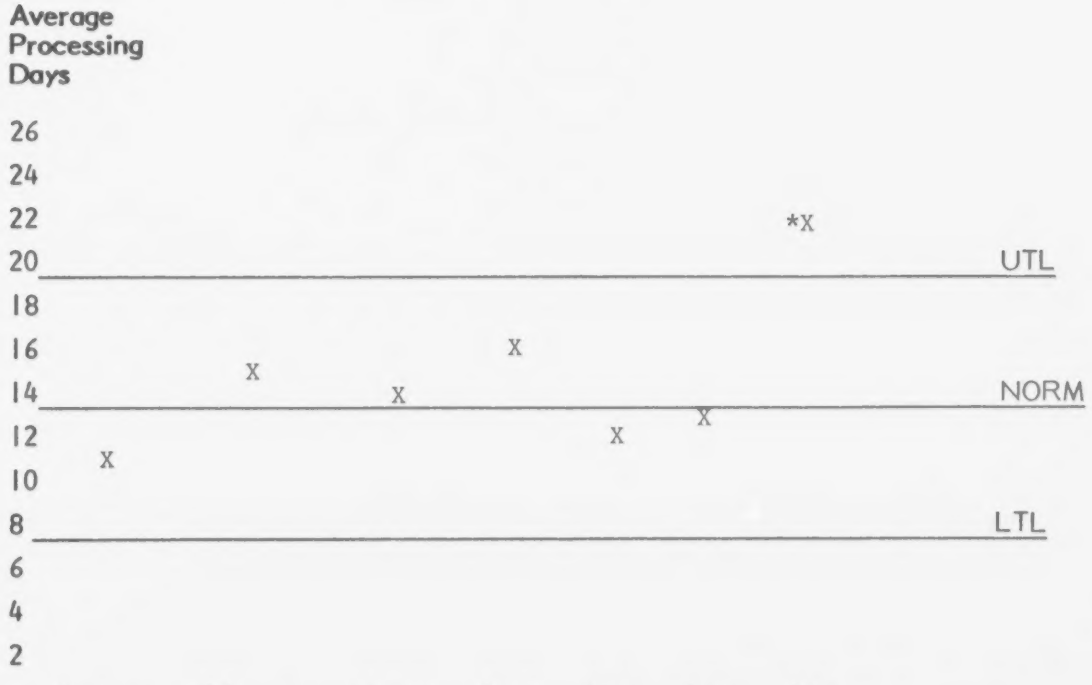
6. Revise new control charts as the norm and tolerances change and repeat the above steps.

EXAMPLE OF A PROCESSING TIME CONTROL CHART

A random sampling of cases shows the following processing time for cases from date of locate to referral for legal processing:

Month	Number of Cases Reviewed		Average Processing Days
Jan.	60		11
Feb.	100		15
Mar.	50		14
Apr.	40		16
May	55		12
Jun.	65		13
		TOTAL	81
July	75		22

81 ÷ 6 = 13.5 (Processing Time Norm)



UTL - Upper Tolerance level

LTL - Lower Tolerance Level

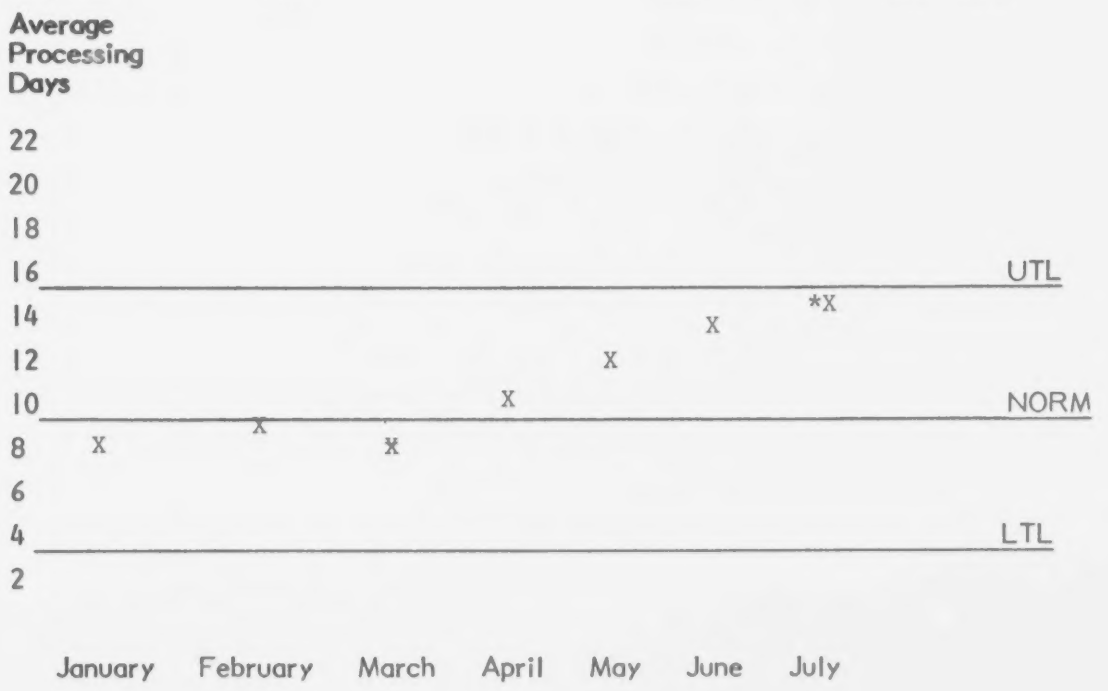
* - Management Investigation Needed Exceeds Tolerance

Figure 10

EXAMPLE OF A CASE DOCUMENTATION QUALITY CONTROL CHART

A random sampling of cases reviewed for the following months revealed the following findings for case documentation errors:

Month	Number of Cases Reviewed	Number of Errors	Error Ratio Percentage
Jan.	60	5	.08 - 8%
Feb.	80	7	.09 - 9%
Mar.	120	.0	.08 - 8%
Apr.	70	7	.10 - 10%
May	50	6	.12 - 12%
Jun.	90	12	.13 - 13%
	TOTAL 470	47	.10 - 10% NORM
July	100	15	.15 - 15%



UTL - Upper Tolerance Level

LTL - Lower Tolerance Level

* - Management Investigation Needed Because of Trend Although Within Tolerance

Figure 11

QUANTITATIVE CONTROL

Efficient and effective case processing requires constant and proper decision making throughout the case processing cycle. Objective decisions cannot be made without pertinent, quantitative information gathered and assimilated throughout the process.

Before designing a quantitative control system that will enhance case processing, it is necessary to define the term "information" as it is used here. Information is knowledge for use by persons with authority and responsibility to make decisions. If the information does not provide the impetus for a decision to do or not do something, it is merely data and not information. Without this understanding, a lot of useless data may be gathered.

Design of a Quantitative Control System

The first task in the design of a quantitative control system is to discern what decisions have to be made at each level in case processing operations. Decision requirements differ among the various IV-D organizations and their case processing systems. However, some basic requirements are common to all or most systems.

For purposes of this workbook, we are listing some of the basic decisions that have to be made for case processing control. This list is not all inclusive; however, the OCSE workbook "Improving Program Performance Through Management Information" gives other practical illustrations of how management information needs can be determined and information reported and formatted through all of the functions of IV-D.

Some Basic Decision Requirements for Control of Case Processing

1. Whether staff performance meets expectations,

2. Whether resources are being utilized properly,

3. Whether all cases can be accounted for,

4. Whether cases should be prioritized,

5. Whether informational sources for case processing should be expanded or changed,

6. Whether operational goals and objectives are being met,

7. Whether enforcement techniques are adequate,

8. Whether interacting components are fulfilling commitments, and

9. Whether new case processing methods should be instituted to improve overall case processing.

The information needed to determine whether case processing objectives are being met must be quantified and broken out for all types of cases in the processing stream, and must be captured while they move through the stream. It can then be summarized for unit and office totals on a weekly, monthly, and quarterly basis.

This information should be captured:

- Number of case receipts,
- Number of case clearances,
- Number of pending cases,
- Age categorization of all pending cases. For example, number of cases 0-30 days old, 31-60, 61-90, 91 and over.

Basic information of this type helps to give both management and operating personnel the knowledge about the caseload which will enable them to make proper decisions for efficient and effective case processing. Case management and control is not

possible without information as to what is coming in, what is going out, and the status of the pending cases.

Receipt and Clearance Points of Cases

Management must decide upon the points in the case process to count receipts and clearances. This can be determined by the office responsibilities and the type of organization. For example, if an office is organized along functional lines and has responsibility for intake, locate and delinquency monitoring, but refers cases to another component for order establishment and collections, receipts and clearances may be counted as the cases enter and leave the functional units. The point of clearance, however, for the units that handle delinquency monitoring is not as clear since, once an obligated case is received, monitoring is an ongoing process. In this situation, control of the workload might be better shown by comparing the number of obligated cases pending with the number of actual payors and the number of delinquent payors with the number of resolutions of delinquencies. In other words, receipts and obligated cases pending would be control items but clearances would not be relevant.

The Connecticut IV-D program is a good example of implementation of a viable quantitative control system. The State IV-D agency provides child support services of location, paternity establishment and obligation establishment directly through six district offices. Workers use a manual system to control their caseloads and to provide management information on the status of these caseloads. Managers use the system to control the caseload by identifying areas where improvement is needed, and using information from workers as the basis for decisions. A key feature of the system is the use of logs in which caseworkers record case receipts, referrals to other components, and dispositions. Reports are generated to management monthly based upon data from the logs. The system shows:

1. Number of pending cases, receipts and dispositions.
2. Timeframes of the pending cases.
3. Status of pending cases.
4. Categories in which cases are pending.
5. Average length of time cases are pending by certain categories.

IV-A/IV-D INTERFACE

Case processing within IV-D can be smoother and faster if the information provided by IV-A on referrals is complete and accurate. If it is not, IV-D must recontact the payee grant applicant or return the referral to IV-A for more complete information. Either situation increases case processing time. A good IV-A/IV-D interface which enhances communication between the two agencies is the key to success. By reducing the instances in which IV-A referrals are returned to IV-D, improves the likelihood for obtaining complete and accurate referrals. This communication should facilitate an understanding of each component's problems and lead to development of effective standards for referral. Other benefits of an effective IV-A/IV-D interface are:

1. Improved quality and timeliness of referrals.

2. Improved cooperation of IV-A clients with IV-D.

3. Enhanced communications between IV-A and IV-D through regular meetings and feedback.

4. Improved sanction process.

5. Enhanced case status change procedures.

The Vermont IV-D program exemplifies how communications between two agencies can lead to improved case processing. In that program the IV-A agency and the IV-D agency worked together for approximately five years to devise an automatic referral process. Through this automated system, IV-A eligibility information and IV-D activity information is merged. IV-A inputs absent parent information into the online system based upon information given by the client. The system then transfers the information to the IV-D system when eligibility is approved. It also automatically generates a letter requesting the absent parent to contact IV-D. The letter also states the name and telephone number of the IV-D employee to contact.

To improve the referral process, the following steps should be taken :

1. IV-A and IV-D should meet to establish standards for the referrals i.e., What is an acceptable referral and what elements are mandatory?

2. IV-D should develop a checklist to review referrals from IV-A. (See Figure 12).

3. Referrals with insufficient information should be returned to IV-A. (Reviews should be performed on a random sampling basis, as a 100 percent review would be time consuming and would not be a good management practice.)

4. IV-D should prepare a monthly report summarizing the results of the reviews. (See Figure 13 for an example of such a report).

5. IV-D and IV-A should use the reports as management tools for discussion at IV-A/IV-D meetings. Or, the report may be used simply as feedback to IV-A.

To assist IV-D in identifying problems in the referral process and in communicating them to IV-A, we have devised two forms. Figure 12, Screening Review Checklist, documents the types of information, which if missing from the referral would impede case processing. This form can be used to develop trends to be reported on. Figure 13, Summary Referral Quarterly Report, may be used as a management tool and in discussions with IV-A on the quality of referrals. Failure to report full information would indicate also that staff need training in this area.

SCREENING REVIEW CHECKLIST FOR REFERRALS

Instruction: Place a check at each unexplained missing item on the referral.

These questions in this section pertain to the absent parent.

SECTION I

() 1 Name
() 2 Other Name
() 3 Social Security Number
() 4 Date of Birth
() 5 Place of Birth
() 6 Race/Ethnic
() 7 Sex
() 8 Telephone
() 9 Home Address
() 10 Mailing Address
() 11 Employer
() 12 Type of Work
() 13 Income or Assets
() 14 Car Identification
() 15 Military Service
() 16 Veteran Status
() 17 Arrest Record
() 18 School Location
() 19 Health Insurance
() 20 Parents Name and Address

_____ Total Checked

Divorce Order #

SECTION II

The questions in this section pertain to the dependent children of the absent parent.

() 1 Name(s)

FIGURE 12 (cont.)

() 2 Birthdate
() 3 Birth place
() 4 Parent Legality
____ Total Checked

SECTION III

The questions in this section pertain to marital status of the dependent children's parents.

() 1 Marriage - date - place
() 2 Present status of marriage
() 3 To whom was the mother married to when the child was born
____ Total Checked

SECTION IV

The questions in this section refer to child support information.

() 1 Amount of court ordered child support
() 2 Amount of child support paid in the last 6 months
() 3 Agency through which child support received
____ Total Checked

SECTION V

The questions in this section refer to the payee/applicant.

() 1 Name
() 2 Social Security Number
() 3 Birthdate
() 4 Race/Ethnic
() 5 Mailing Address
() 6 Sex
() 7 Residential Address
() 8 Telephone
() 9 Relationship to the absent parent
() 10 Relationship to the dependent children
____ Total Checked
____ Grand Total

FIGURE 12

SUMMARY REFERRAL QUALITY REPORT

Month _____

1. ____ Number of referrals reviewed.
2. ____ Number of referrals not meeting standards.
3. ____ Percentage of defective referrals.

Item Breakdown

Sections with most defective items (descending order).

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Items within sections most defective in (descending order).

Section I	Item	Number of times defective
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	etc.	

Section II	Item	Number of times defective
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	etc.	

FIGURE 13 (cont.)

Section III	Item	Number of times defective
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	etc.	

Section IV	Item	Number of times defective
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	etc.	

Section V	Item	Number of times defective
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	etc.	

FIGURE 13

CASE FILES MANAGEMENT

Case files should be designed to meet the case processing needs of the office. Managers should assess whether their system effectively supports their case processing operations. To make an assessment, the following are some questions which may be asked:

1. Are the files arranged so that filing and retrieval of case records can be performed without unnecessary motion and delays?

2. Are case file controls adequate to determine location of files and to prevent misfiles?

3. Are files located in areas accessible to the personnel needing them?

4. Are storage facilities adequate for present and expanding case files?

5. Are procedures present for file system operations and are staff aware of these procedures?

To evaluate present filing systems, keep in mind the main goals of any filing system:

- To make records available and retrievable when needed.
- To keep all related materials together so that the case histories will be available and accessible in one place, and
- To provide a permanent, safe place for storing records when they are not in use.

Various types of filing arrangements can be used to meet filing systems goals. The most common in use, however, are alphabetic and numeric. The alphabetic arrangement uses absent parent or IV-A client surname. The numeric system uses the IV-A case number or a newly created IV-D number. The location of the files

may be either centralized or decentralized and each has advantages. Regardless of the arrangement, however, methods of cross-referencing should be developed to facilitate case retrieval.

Centralized	Decentralized
1. Duplication of files reduced or eliminated	1. Less floor space used
2. Maximum utilization of equipment, supplies and personnel	2. Conducive to fast, immediate reference
3. Designated file personnel who establish uniform procedures to maintain and control the transfer, retrieval and retention of records	3. Closer physical distance to point of use

These variations in locations and arrangements are due to organizational differences, logistics, user groups, frequency of use, etc. Management must determine the type of arrangement most appropriate for the particular office. Whatever the arrangement, it is important that control procedures be established that will enhance efficiency of the case files system.

Filing Control Systems

The application of adequate and uniform files control procedures enhances the system's performance functions, and provides for greater efficiency in a IV-D office. A familiar situation in any IV-D office is being unable to locate a case record when it is needed. The result is extensive searching to determine the record's whereabouts. Another occasion during which a record is often misplaced is during the transfer from one functional unit to another for case processing, or during a jurisdictional change when the record is forwarded to another office

without any established control procedures. Confusion results if the case record is needed for reference at a future date and, there is no adequate way to determine the case record location. Providing procedures for the control of records through transfer, charge-out and follow-up can eliminate unnecessary searches for a case record and reduce both lost time and costs in a IV-D office.

The following list of control mechanisms may be applied to a jurisdiction's filing system to aid in the efficiency and effectiveness of the system:

Case Control Cards

Case Control Cards may be used in lieu of the actual case folders in controlling file information. Under this system, case cards contain all of the pertinent information in the folders. The cards contain the name and addresses of the client, absent parent, and children, as well as a summary of legal data, the obligor's payment record, and a chronological log of case activity.

This system is used in the Oregon IV-D program. The 8 1/2" X 11" cards with color coded tabs are stored upright in tubs on caseworkers' desks. All case activity is noted in abbreviated narratives on the cards as the activity occurs. This system provides for built-in retrieval and quick review.

Outcard Systems

One basic, yet effective, way to determine if a record is not in file or has been charged-out is by inserting an "outcard" in place of the requested case record. These cards usually protrude above other regular file folders and alert the file clerk that the record is in use. To determine the record's location, information on the outcard should consist of name or number of the file in use, requestor's name, date of removal, section or office, and phone number. Employees can complete information on the outcard at the file area or bring the filled-out requester slip with them. Outcards can provide efficient control

if their use is enforced by ensuring that they are inserted in the file space when records are requested and removed. Without such enforcement, outcard systems are useless.

The Vermont IV-D office keeps track of pulled case folders through a mini-outcard system. When cases are pulled from the files, a mini-outcard is filled out, and put in a folder in a drawer. The information is similar to that on a large outcard which is placed in file in lieu of the pulled folder. The mini-outcard file is controlled by the files manager. These mini-outcards are used to track cases still out of files for a third week. A printed notice is sent to the person who charged out the case to determine if he/she still wants to keep it.

Card File System

A card file can also serve as a control for record removal and transfer. When a case record is requested, the card is annotated with the proper information and placed in the card file. For continual control, file personnel should periodically review the card file to follow-up on any unreturned records. Card files allow for easy insertion of new information and are relatively simple to develop for any office filing needs. The previously mentioned Connecticut card file for suspense cases is an example of this system. (See Develop Uniform and Reliable Tickler Systems section.)

Cross Reference System

A cross reference system aids in rapid case record retrieval. Based upon the information received, the file clerk can determine where the record is located. The system can be set up in the form of a card file or can be installed as part of an automated system. For numerical files, a cross reference system is required to direct name to number for file retrieval. In some applications of color coding systems, the color code serves as a built in cross reference. The cross reference system should be created to allow easy

retrieval by a filing arrangement for which information is most commonly requested or needed for reference.

Color Coding Systems

Color coding uses different colors in a filing system for easy identification of files. Since colors are easily recognizable, color coding leads to files being easily located.

Color coding filing systems can be adapted to almost any filing situation. Comparable costs with other more sophisticated systems favor their use in IV-D offices. In fact, some State and local jurisdictions have already put into operation partial or complete color coding techniques. Vermont has an excellent filing system containing color coded files. The files are arranged alphabetically by AP surname. With color coding applied to the first and second letters of the surname. This system helps to prevent misfiling as it can be easily detected if files are not in proper sequence.

Color codes may also be used to facilitate priority handling. Colors may be used on folders to designate files with certain characteristics to be worked under a priority scheme and to indicate if the case record is active, inactive or closed. This makes it unnecessary to review the contents of each folder to determine the order in which cases should be worked or reviewed.

In applying efficient control procedures to an office, careful consideration should be focused on where problems most frequently occur and how they can be eliminated. By strengthening present controls or adopting a new method, file loss can be reduced and, needed files can be retreived in a timely manner. Control procedures need not be either complicated or expensive. All personnel, however, should know the procedures and management should take measures to enforce them.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPROVING CASE PROCESSING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH OFFICE AUTOMATION

INTRODUCTION

Interest in office automation is usually spurred by the identification of case processing and management needs and concerns. Some concerns or needs may be:

- Supervisors' inability to produce accurate caseload and activity reports because information is unattainable or cumbersome.
- Clericals spending too much time typing routine correspondence.
- Caseworkers' inability to locate case records quickly.
- Cases "falling out" of the system because of ineffective tickler systems.
- An increasing amount of undistributed funds because collections are distributed by a time consuming manual system.
- Caseworkers devoting a great deal of time monitoring cases for delinquency or caseworkers not monitoring cases because of other time consuming activities.
- Complaints by caseworker of too many cases to work.

These and other related problems can reduce the progress of your office's case flow and turn potential collections into high operational costs. If your office experiences any of the above problems, then office automation may be useful for your organization. Exploring this option is a worthwhile effort. If your office has initiated efforts to automate its case processing and management system, but has fallen short of the desired outcomes, it may prove profitable to explore further.

At this point, you might be asking yourself such questions as:

- What is office automation?
- What is an automated case processing system?
- What benefits can our organization obtain from using office automation technology?

The following pages are devoted to assisting you and your staff in answering those important questions. In addition, a step-by-step process is outlined which describes how to develop, implement and evaluate your automation project. The ideas, information and approaches presented in this section will guide and stimulate new thinking and assist you and your staff in making the best decisions possible for your organization. The topics discussed in this chapter are:

- What Is An Automated Case Processing and Management System?
- Why Automate A Case Processing and Management System?
- Automating Your Case Processing System: A Gradual, Step-By-Step Process.

WHAT IS AN AUTOMATED CASE PROCESSING AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

Office automation technology offers a wide variety of innovations that can affect the ways of performing traditional office tasks. For child support offices, case processing and management information needs are primary targets for automation. Essentially, work related to each IV-D function--intake, locate, establishment, enforcement, collections and distribution--is accomplished by using various automated equipment and methods. Case processing and management activities performed by using manual systems may be completely or partially accomplished by selected automation tools. Let's examine some examples of case processing and management activities other child support offices have used to automate, and the types of automation technology available to your organization.

Examples of Automated Case Processing and Management Activities

An automated case processing and management system performs selected work activities related to the IV-D functions. Of course, this does not mean that all your case processing and management activities should or even could become automated. As other child support offices point out, it is so easy to fall into the trap of wanting to automate everything at one time. Remember, an automated system evolves over a period of time. You and your staff will need to continually select which activities performed manually could be accomplished using automation. Figure 14 provides you with examples of activities other child support offices have selected for automation.

FUNCTIONS SELECTED BY OTHER OFFICES FOR AUTOMATION

INTAKE

- o Receive case related data from other agencies.
- o Receive IV-D referral data directly from IV-A via computer terminal.
- o Merge court files (if any) with IV-A data.
- o Determine if referral is an old or new case.
- o Screen stored client/recipient data to ensure all necessary information has been collected.
- o Open case files directly on system:
  - assign case numbers and other pertinent information
- o Store case file information.
- o Retrieve and print selected documents containing appropriate client/recipient related information.
- o Verify IV-A eligibility status.
- o Initiate "welcome to the system" letter to any obligor with a good address.
- o Screen cases according to a predetermined processing scheme and assign cases to the next function (i.e., Locate or Enforcement).
- o Alert appropriate worker to new case if action is needed.
- o Maintain tickler files and print daily, weekly, or monthly status reports:
  - when IV-D referrals are re-submitted to IV-A
  - when court orders, divorce decrees, payment histories etc. have been requested.
- o Manipulate caseload data and print reports.
- o Produce statistical reports showing:
  - number of referrals accepted from IV-A
  - number of cases resubmitted to IV-A for acquisition of necessary information.
- o Produce graphs and other visual aids that depict intake caseload activities .

FIGURE 14 (cont.)

LOCATE

- o Communicate directly with other computer systems for locate information (i.e., Division of Motor Vehicles, Unemployment Compensation Program, and Directories.)
- o Reprioritize cases based on history.
- o If a good locate is made, move case to new function and, if appropriate, to attention of caseworker.
- o Print selected documents that request locate information or verification.
- o Maintain tickler systems to record when inquiries are sent and to close a case if locate information is unavailable.
- o Review and/or receive case related data from other agencies' records.
- o Store information on case files (i.e., locate information and action taken on a case.)
- o Manipulate caseload data and printing of reports.
- o Produce statistics for:
  - cases referred for locate
  - successful locates
  - cases pending locate.
- o Produce graphs and other visual aids that depict locate statistical data.

ESTABLISHMENT

- o Reprioritize cases for this function.
- o Establish court docket.
- o Print selected documents using appropriate case file data.
- o Store, maintain and retrieve case file information.
- o Manipulate caseload data and printing reports.
- o Produce graphs and other visual aids that depict statistical data.
- o Maintain tickler systems.

FIGURE 14 (cont.)

ENFORCEMENT

- o Reprioritize cases for this function.
- o Move to locate if both addresses go bad.
- o Produce needed documents and correspondence using appropriate case file information:
  - Notices to the respondent, employer, etc.
  - Instructions to the respondent, employer, etc.
  - Petition for Order.
  - Affidavits.
- o Performs collection monitoring function by:
  - Retrieving payment information from the clerk of the courts office.
  - Posting acquired payment information on case files.
  - Determining if the case needs a warning letter or enforcement referral.
  - Printing the necessary referrals and letters.
  - Compiling and printing a statistical report on collections for the user (i.e., caseworker and investigator).
- o Maintain court calendars.
- o Compile, manipulate and print case file information for processing State cases, wage assignments, and IRS tax offset and related statistical reports.
- o Maintain tickler systems.

COLLECTIONS AND DISTRIBUTION

- o Post payments directly onto case files.
- o Calculate arrearage amounts.
- o Produce bills and payment statements.
- o Distribute funds to various accounts.
- o Compile and print statistical reports on amount of AFDC and non-AFDC collections, amount of nondistributed funds, and account balances.

FIGURE 14 (cont.)

Examples of Automation Technology Available to Your Office

Office automation technology consists of various equipment (i.e., office devices) and the new methods of performing tasks (office practice concepts). How much and what kind of office equipment and practice concepts your office will use depends on a number of factors, such as: case processing and management needs, caseload size, availability of resources (staff and financial), and top management support. These and other influencing factors will be discussed throughout this section. First, let us examine the technology currently available to you and your staff.

Office devices. These are the kinds of equipment that are used to accomplish various tasks:

- o Intelligent Typewriters. A new generation of office typewriters which have computer-like capabilities and connections for telephone communications.

- o Copiers. Machines that duplicate printed material. Potential for communication link between copiers and other workstations is predicted for the office of the future.

- o Photocomposers. Devices which produce a film used in photo-offset printing.

- o Facsimile. Devices used to transmit documents within an office or over long distances.

- o Word Processors. Devices which enable experienced typists to view a facsimile of a page of manuscript, before it is printed on the paper.

- o Plotters. Devices which generate high quality visual aids and drawings (better than printer-produced drawings). Today's plotters produce multicolored images with traditional white copy background, and viewgraphs for transparency projection.

- o Optical Scanners. Specialized devices used in high volume operations where large quantities of typed information are entered into a computer database or word processing operation.

- o Microfilm/Microfiche. Microfilm (roll film) and microfiche (sheet film) which allow for the storage and easy retrieval of information.

- o Computers. Device capable of accepting information, applying prescribed processes to the information, and supplying the results of these processes. A computer usually consists of input and output devices, storage, arithmetic and logical units, and a control unit.

Office practice concepts. Focus on "how work activities are performed." Examples included are:

- o Information Distribution. A centralized component which houses an extensive body of organizational data to be used by a variety of workstations.

- o Data Bank. Any collection of data/information stored on machine-readable medium for automatic dissemination.

- o Correspondence Center. A modern version of the "typing pool" where the original copy is received in the form of mini-cassettes, telephone recordings, computer diskettes magnetic cards.

- o Electronic Filing. This concept eliminates hard copy records for the most frequently used and most critical documents.

- o Electronic Mail. A term used to describe a computer's ability to send messages from one keyboard to another via telephone lines.

- o Teleconferencing. Telecommunication link up which enables several different people to participate in the same telephone call, meeting, etc.

WHY AUTOMATE A CASE PROCESSING AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

More and more, child support offices are automating their case processing and management systems as a way of increasing program operation productivity. Office automation technology provides useful tools for accomplishing the work activities within each IV-D function (intake, locate, etc.) And, as mentioned throughout this workbook, an efficient and effective case processing and management system is critical for meeting your program goals and objectives.

Child support programs that have automated their case processing systems have realized many benefits:

- o Automation provides a process for improving case processing and management. So often the decision to automate is made under the assumption that poor case processing performance can be corrected by automation. Automation alone cannot make an ineffective case processing and management system better. Automation is part of the cure, but not a panacea. Thus, automating your manual case processing system does provide a justification for investing time and staff in improving your case processing and management system. Remember, you want to automate the process, not its problems. If you really do not like the way a step is being done manually, automating it will make you hate it 10,000 times as much!

  Getting your case processing and management system ready for automation will require:

  - Streamlining manual procedures and practices
  - Eliminating, revising or creating forms, report formats, tickler systems
  - Reviewing staff allocation and making necessary changes.

  You will want to prepare your manual system for conversion to automation. Working out problems, issues, and concerns before automation is often easier before than afterwards.

- Automation can result in case processing task simplification. Automation technology provides equipment and methods which are capable of partially or completely performing case processing activities. Adding these tools to your case processing system will enable some work activities to be accomplished by the automated system, eliminating the need for performing time-consuming manual operations and reducing case processing time. For example, the child support office of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, had one full-time staff member involved in monitoring the status of AFDC cases. This work activity involved obtaining new case data manuals and recording changes associated with name, address, support orders, etc. onto case file documents. Since this activity required a large percentage of the worker's time, it was selected as a target for automation. Now using computer technology, the worker obtains necessary information from various sources, (e.g., IV-A, court system) enters and stores new data onto IV-D computer case file and quickly produces documents with current information thus saving the worker a substantial amount of time gathering and recording case information. Increasing the accuracy and timely modification of case records, has reduced case processing time by eliminating delays due to insufficient information.

- Caseload management improvement. By providing built-in tickler systems, indexes and lists, an automated case processing and management system can assist staff in prioritizing tasks, tracking future events and/or deadlines, and managing the flow of work. In addition, an automated system by providing the necessary data can assist managers/supervisors conduct case management activities--caseload assignments, conducting quality control reviews, developing routine or regular special reports, etc.

- Development and maintenance of an effective Management Information System (MIS). Since collecting information manually is very time consuming, only minimal detailed information pertaining to case processing is recorded and maintained within an actual file. An automated system assists the caseworker in tracking and monitoring all or most case processing activities (intake, locate, establishment, enforcement and collection). In addition, an

automated system provides for caseload data to be organized, stored and retrieved in a variety of report formats useful for managing your office, its people and work. An excellent presentation of this topic can be found in a workbook called Improving Program Performance Through Management Information. Contact the National Child Support Enforcement Reference Center, Rockville, Maryland for a copy.

- Improving interface with other offices. With increasing caseloads, the need for better interface with outside offices has never been more important. Whether you are working with IV-A or the Attorney General's Office, you need accurate, reliable and current case data for efficient and effective case processing. For example, referrals received from IV-A are often returned because insufficient client information has been collected. And, as you know, this causes substantial delays in processing these cases. The Vermont office avoided this problem by using computer technology to automate their referral process. Prior to automation, IV-A and IV-D staff worked together and developed a listing of client data needed for an acceptable IV-D referral. Using computer terminals, IV-A enters client data onto their computer files. Later, this same information is automatically sent via computer into the IV-D office computer system. By automating the referral process, information exchange, retrieval and storage is achieved. In addition, uniformity of client referrals is greatly enhanced.

The actual benefits achieved from converting manual operations to automated processes depend on how well you plan, develop and implement your automation efforts. This type of project takes energy, management and staff interest. Therefore, the entire project needs to be planned from start to finish and implemented gradually step-by-step.

AUTOMATING YOUR CASE PROCESSING SYSTEM: A GRADUAL, STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

Adding new technology within your organization's environment will affect the way work is accomplished. And, as you probably know, this will require a sufficient amount of time and staff involvement. Instead of "instant" automation, integrating automation tools within your program operations should be viewed as a gradual, step-by-step process rather than a one-time project. The experiences of other child support offices point out that small, simple, successful steps toward automation are easier to build upon than large, complex, chaotic leaps.

Keeping this in mind, identifying specific case processing and management needs and creating an overall vision of where the system should be in the future will provide sufficient information for you and your staff to select a starting point for automation efforts. For example, an office experiencing an increasing amount of undistributed funds due to time-consuming, complex manual procedures, may choose collection and distribution activities as a starting point for their efforts. In this case, activities such as posting payments, producing receipts, computing arrearage balances, distributing monies to various accounts and maintaining account balances become primary targets for automation efforts. Once these manual processes have been converted to an automated assisted system, other case processing and management needs can be addressed according to your office's plan of action.

At this point, you might be asking yourself such questions as:

- Where do I begin?
- How can I get other staff members interested in thinking about automation when they are so used to doing things manually?
- What's involved in developing and/or implementing strategies for using office automation in my office?

The following pages briefly describe the process of automating a case processing and management system and consider such issues as:

- Factors influencing implementation success
- Identifying case processing needs and priorities for automation
- Selecting and procuring equipment and services staff
- Staff training
- Planning automation implementation
- Evaluating results.

You and your staff will be able to use this material to identify and implement small, simple, successful steps towards automating your case processing and management system.

Overcoming Obstacles Which Hinder the Effectiveness of Implementation Efforts

Office automation technology has been implemented within child support offices with varying degrees of success. Hardware and software performance have not been the only contributors to implementation problems. It is important to consider what these other factors are so your future endeavors can avoid the same costly mistakes. The following factors have been identified as debilitating to automation implementation efforts.

- Staff resistance to change caused by:
  - a lack of "user" participation in systems requirements, specification and software development
  - a lack of staff participation in the decision making process
  - anxiety related to changes in established procedures
  - a lack of communication during the implementation process
- Inadequate staff planning
- Inadequate needs assessment prior to system solution
- Unrealistic expectations as to the time needed to implement a system
- Lack of effective evaluation strategies for measuring the impact of computer applications
- The selection of hardware before software. (This can severely limit the number and type of computer applications available on a given type of equipment.)

This list is not all inclusive. If you can think of any additional factors that you have observed from your experiences, add them to this list and be fully aware of their potential impact.

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Remember that the problems associated with the implementation process are principally a function of errors in human judgment rather than technological difficulties. Anticipating these potential obstacles and taking preventive action may increase the likelihood of your project being a success. Some approaches you may use to enhance your implementation efforts include:

- o Actively involve staff members in planning for computer applications - At the start, request staff input. People support of what they help create. Don't just make this a superficial effort; get the staff involved. It is vital to the entire developmental process!

- o Obtain support of upper-level management - This helps establish a climate that encourages staff to invest the time and effort required in the change process.

- o Clearly establish roles and responsibilities in the implementation process - Without assigning specific responsibilities, needed activities may not be performed. People may assume that someone else will do a task and the task will not be accomplished.

- Maintain regular communication regarding progress of implementation efforts - Exchange of information during the change process helps reduce staff resistance and maximizes staff members knowledge of system goals and operation.
- Establish realistic timeframes - Experience suggests that delays will occur and that allowing for delay will reduce frustrations and anxiety related to the change process.

- Maintain careful documentation of computer programs during the design process - This helps to reduce frustration and anxiety when inevitable problems develop.

- Select and use a comprehensive model - This serves as a guide for planning and initiating all activities necessary for office automation implementation in your organization.

A Six-Step Process For Automating Your Case Processing System

Improving program operation efficiency and effectiveness is the primary goal of automating your case processing and management system. To achieve desired results and obtain as many organizational benefits as possible, you and your staff must approach automation implementation in a meaningful, thoughtful manner. This section is devoted to describing a six-step model for planning, implementing, and evaluating your office automation project. The purpose of presenting this model is to assist you and your staff in thinking about and working through several basic yet important issues. Questions to ask yourself are:

- How effective is our present case processing system?
- What case processing activities can we automate?
- Should we automate?
- What type of office automation technology is appropriate?
- What training will our staff need and who will provide it?
- What individuals or group(s) should participate in the pilot test?
- What modifications in the hardware or software need to be made prior to full scale implementation?
- How will we know what improvements have been made? What will we measure to answer this question?

The six-step process for automating your case processing and management activities is outlined in Figure 15. These six steps include:

Step One -- Needs Analysis
Step Two -- Selection of Automation Technology
Step Three -- Action Planning
Step Four -- Pilot Project Phase
Step Five -- Staff Training
Step Six -- Operation, Evaluation and Refinement.

As you progress through each step, you will occasionally need to repeat some activities of a previously completed phase. For example, after completing the pilot project phase, Step Four, you and your staff will need to make any necessary revisions to the action plan completed during Step Three. These revisions may include: new required activities, changing roles and/or responsibilities, target dates, etc. This back and forth movement between steps is often required in order to successfully accomplish automation implementation.

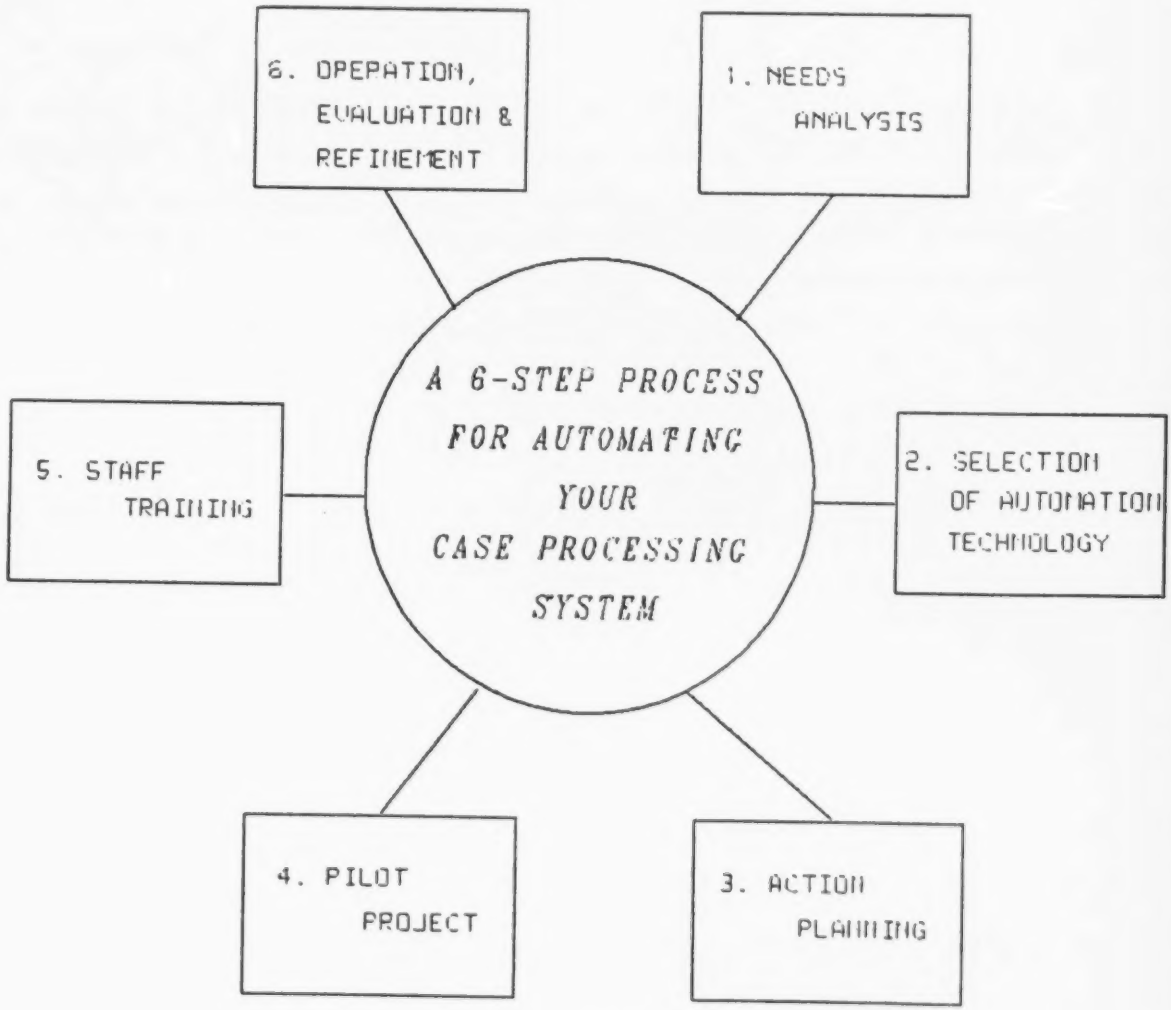
6. OPERATION, EVALUATION & REFINEMENT
1. NEEDS ANALYSIS
A 6-STEP PROCESS FOR AUTOMATING YOUR CASE PROCESSING SYSTEM
5. STAFF TRAINING
2. SELECTION OF AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY
4. PILOT PROJECT
3. ACTION PLANNING

FIGURE 15

STEP ONE - NEEDS ANALYSIS

During this step you will identify the:

- Case processing and management needs your organization wants office automation to fill;
- Information requirements such as, desired data output, available data inputs and files needed; and
- Organizational and management constraints.

The main goal of Step One - Needs Analysis is to collect sufficient information necessary for the initiation, development, implementation and evaluation of your office automation project. The exploration of issues, concerns and needs of your organization, its people and work will ensure you of having the data needed to make the best decisions. Before actually conducting the needs analysis, you will need to consider three important questions.

- What information needs to be collected?
- How will the information be collected? and
- What needs to be done with the collected information?

Let's examine each of these important questions so you can plan and initiate the needs assessment within your office.

QUESTION ONE: WHAT INFORMATION NEEDS TO BE COLLECTED?

The major topic areas your information collection efforts focus on during problem analysis are your organization, its management tools, staff and work activities. These are presented in Figure 16. Using each of these topic areas, you can formulate questions that will assist in obtaining a comprehensive overview of your organization, your case processing and management system. Sample questions for each of these topic areas are presented in Figures 17 through 20. Under each figure, space is provided for you to formulate other relevant questions.

INFORMATION YOUR NEEDS ANALYSIS SHOULD CONSIDER

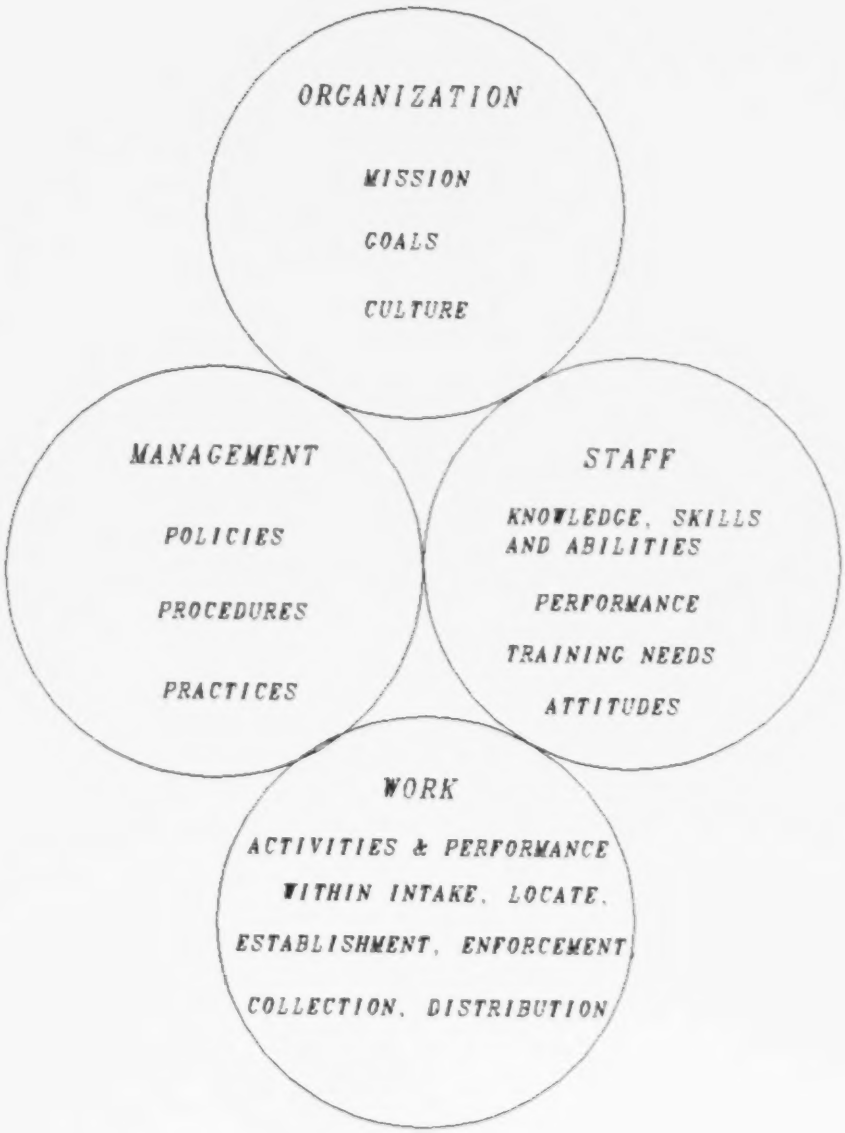

FIGURE 16

ORGANIZATION

Mission, Goals, and Culture

- What are the existing program goals our office attempting to achieve? Future goals?
- Do the decisions of top management reflect a concern for present or future case processing and management needs?
- Is our office fairly open to change?

FIGURE 17

What other topic questions do you think are important to explore?

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STAFF

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities, Performance, Training Needs, and Attitudes (i.e., regarding Office Automation)

- Are staff members satisfied with the filing system, tickler systems, work policies, procedures and practices? What improvements do they recommend?
- What training/experience do staff members have in using computers, word processors, etc.?
- If automation is desired, what staff could we use or hire for this project?
- How do staff members perceive the effects of office automation on the quality of their worklife?

FIGURE 18

What other topic questions do you think are important to explore?

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WORK

Activities and Performance (Intake, Locate, Establishment, etc.)

- What activities are involved within each case processing function? (Intake, Locate, etc)? Which activities are most time consuming? Which activities seem to require decision making/reasoning versus rote, mechanical action(s)?
- With the new legislative mandates, what new job tasks will need to be accomplished?
- What data or information is needed for caseworkers to accomplish case processing and management activities?
- What information do we presently collect or want to collect to meet mandatory reporting requirements?
- What forms do we use to collect or transmit information internally? Outside our office? Do they obtain or transmit only necessary data?

FIGURE 19

What other topic questions do you think are important to explore?

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MANAGEMENT

Policies, Procedures, Practices and Resources

- Do present policies, practices and/or procedures contribute to the accomplishment of case processing and management activities? If not, what are the obstacles?
- What financial resources are available to us?
- What timeframe will we be working under?

FIGURE 20

What other topic questions do you think are important to explore?

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QUESTION TWO: HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE COLLECTED?

Essentially, the methods used to collect needed information will depend on a number of factors, such as availability of staff, size of staff, time restrictions, etc. Figure 21 lists several information collecting techniques you may want to use. Of course, you can choose more than one technique. The important goal here is to collect all the needed data for making the best decisions possible.

Information Collection Techniques

- o Develop and distribute questionnaires
- o Conduct interviews with staff, management, and supervisors
- o Conduct group meetings (Staff, Team/Unit, etc.)
- o Review documents such as:
  - Quality control reviews
  - Reports (collection, etc.)
  - Workplans
  - Special reports focusing on new child support legislation
  - Flowcharts outlining the workflow (See Figures 3-7 of this workbook for a description of how to develop a flowchart)

FIGURE 21

Can you think of any other techniques you may want to use? If so, add them to the list.

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QUESTION THREE: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE WITH THE INFORMATION COLLECTED?

After data collection activities have been completed, you will have a good working knowledge of your organization, its people and work. In order to complete Step Two-Selection of Automation Technology, and Step Three-Action Planning, you need to list:

- o case processing and management needs you want automation to address,
- o information requirements, such as data outputs wanted, inputs obtainable and files needed, and
- o organizational and management constraints.

Examples of how each of these lists may look are provided in Figure 22.

EXISTING AND FUTURE NEEDS WE WANT AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY TO ADDRESS

CASE PROCESSING AND MANAGEMENT NEEDS

- maintain case history data
- access IV-A case records
- produce format letters
- compute caseload statistics
- produce caseworker reports
- maintain collection and distribution records
- maintain tickler systems
- produce listing providing the number of cases in backlog
- access Division of Motor Vehicles

DATA INPUTS DESIRABLE

- Case ID Number
- AP's Name
- Amount Collected by Case
- Worker ID
- Actual Amount of Order
- Date Received in Locate
- Court Date Assignment
- Date Case Referred to Next Function

DATA OUTPUTS WANTED

- Number and Amount of AFDC Collections
- Total collections through wage withholding
- Total number of establishment cases
- Total number of inactive cases
- Number of URESA cases processed
- Number and amount of non-AFDC collections
- Number of liens imposed
- Total number of locate cases
- Total Number of active cases
- Amount collected by Federal offset

FIGURE 22

ACTIVITY 4: DEVELOPING A NEEDS PROFILE

In the space provided below, develop a Needs Profile for your office by listing: 1) the specific case processing and management needs you want automation technology to address; 2) desired data input; and 3) desired output.

NEEDS PROFILE

EXISTING AND FUTURE NEEDS
WE WANT AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY TO ADDRESS

DESIRED DATA INPUTS

DESIRED OUTPUTS

STEP TWO - SELECTION OF AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY

During this step you will:

- Explore and identify types of automation technology and identify potential vendors that match case processing and management needs;
- Match automation technology with case processing and management needs; and
- Compare alternatives and make a selection.

Exploring the world of automation and selecting the most appropriate options are the main goals of Step Two - Selection of Automation Technology. At this point, you might have questions such as:

- How will I make the best choices if I've never seen or used a computer or word processor?
- Where do I find information on the various types of office automation technology available?
- Who are the vendors and how will I find them?
- How do I select the best technology for my office?

Most managers and supervisors of child support offices will be facing these questions in the years to come. As technology advances and automation costs are reduced, child support offices will be changing to automated systems to address their case processing and case management needs. Child support offices report very little, if any, previous knowledge or experience using automation technology implementation prior to their automation effort. Let us examine several ways they met the challenges of selecting office automation technology for their office which may help you in your search for information.

1. **Exploring technology options available, finding out how they work and who the suppliers (vendors) are.**

Several sources of information and ideas are:

- o Periodicals and books;
- o Seminars, workshops, etc. sponsored by vendors, universities, community colleges and special interest groups (check newspapers, newsletters, bulletin boards, and yellow pages);
- o Data professionals within and outside your organization;
- o Other people within and outside your organization;
- o Vendors (check yellow pages, newspapers, and magazines); and
- o Computer stores.

2. **Matching automation technology to operational needs**

In Step One, Problem Analysis, a list of case processing and management needs was to be developed. Now you want to find the office devices and concepts (automation technology) that will address these needs, issues and concerns. Listed below are critical questions you should consider when exploring office automation options:

- o Does the technology option meet functional requirements specified by Federal, State, and local jurisdictions?
- o How easy is it to adapt to your existing case processing system?
- o How long will it take to implement?

- Does the technology have the potential of interfacing with other offices (i.e., State IV-D, Motor Vehicle Department, IV-A agency)?

- What are the costs and benefits?

- What resources (staff) are required if this technology option is used?

- What user knowledge and skills are required by this technology option?

3. **Compare your options and make a selection**

   Once you have identified: (1) the automation technology options, (2) potential vendors, and (3) advantages and disadvantages of each option, you need to compare the alternatives and select the best solution for your case processing and management issues, concerns and problems. One method you can use to compare different alternatives is the cost-benefit analysis. A cost-benefit anaylsis contains:

   - A brief description of the new technology and how it can enhance your case processing and management system.

   - A list of operating and maintenance costs (purchase of equipment, staff, training).

   - Benefits.

   A more detailed discussion is presented in the OCSE Guidelines for Conducting a Cost-Benefit Analysis (contact the OCSE National Reference Center, Rockville, MD)

The final selection made will depend, of course, on a variety of factors over which you may have little if any control (i.e., organizational or management constraints). There is, however, one powerful influence on the final selection(s) made--top

management and staff support. Gaining the support of top management, staff and colleagues reduces potential resistance to change and increases the chances for your ideas to be accepted.

STEP THREE - ACTION PLANNING

During this step you will:

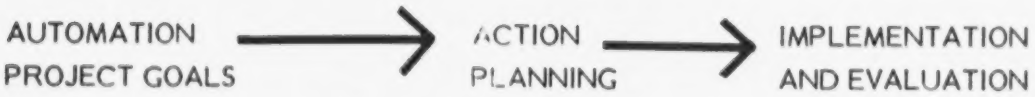
- Integrate the automation technology to your existing case processing and management system;
- Identify roles and responsibilities;
- Develop an evaluation strategy; and
- Delineate operating procedures.

Action planning is the process of outlining the activities and methods required to implement the automation you have selected and of evaluating its usefulness in addressing your case processing and management needs. Essentially, the information collected in Steps 1 and 2 will be used during Action Planning to answer the questions:

- What are we going to do?
- How are we going to do it?
- Who's going to do it?
- When will it be done?

- What are our success indicators?

Thus, action planning facilitates the transition from automation project goals to implementation and evaluation of the activities leading to their achievement.



I. Action Planning

During this initial planning process, you and your staff will need to focus on four major topic areas. They are:

1. Integration of automation technology in your existing case processing system;

2. Delineation of roles and responsibilities;

3. Development of an evaluation strategy; and

4. Delineation of operating procedures.

Below is a list of questions for each of these topic areas which will assist you and your staff in outlining the details of your project.

a. Integration of automation technology to your existing case processing system

Consider these questions:

- o What work activities within Intake, Locate, Establishing Orders, Establishing Paternity, Enforcement and/or Collections and Distribution will become automated?

- o What activities will be directly assisted by the new automation technology?

- o What activities will become automated first?

- o What changes or modifications need to be made to case processing and management activities before automation is accomplished? (i.e., forms used, procedures and policies).

- o What information or data bases can we develop, share and/or access with other agencies?

b. Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities

Consider this question:

- o Who will be responsible for certain tasks before, during and after automation implementation?

c. Development of an Evaluation Strategy

Consider these questions:

- o What are our success indicators?

- o How will evaluation data be collected?

- How will we provide feedback on implementation performance to management and staff?

d. Delineation of Operating Procedures

Consider such questions as:

- How will we schedule caseworker times on computer?
- How will we maintain confidentiality of records?
- How will we maintain office automation devices?

2. The Action Plan

After you and your staff have considered the issues and questions outlined in the previous section, you will be ready to plan your overall approach for automating your case processing system. One useful tool for planning your automation project is the Action Plan. By identifying required tasks, responsible persons and target dates, you and your staff will be able to facilitate the transition from automation project goals to implementation and evaluation. A sample Action Plan format is provided in Figure 23.

Remember, your action plan will be tailored to your needs and, therefore, will look different than the sample (i.e., tasks identified). Use the space provided to develop your own Action Plan.

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

	TASKS	RESPONSIBLE PERSONS	TARGET DATES
1.	Conduct analysis of case processing and management needs/issues/concerns and identify requirements of the new system.	Sylvia Porter, (Coordinator) and Users Group	January 86 - March 86
2.	Develop general system design to address needs identified in 1. above,	Sylvia Porter and Data Processing Staff	March 86 - June 86
3.	Develop APD document for funding and conduct cost benefit analysis and system resource requirements analysis.	Sylvia Porter and John Phillips	June 86 - August 86
4.	Complete systems proposal and advertise for bids; evaluate bids; make vendor selection; and notify vendor.	Cathy Meadows, Users Group	August 86 - October 86
5.	Detailed system design completed by vendor.	Vendor	October 86 - December 86
6.	Purchase hardware, software.	Vendor, Cathy Meadows	December 86 - February 87
7.	Prepare space for equipment.	Administrative Staff	January 87 - March 87
8.	Develop evaluation criteria.	Sylvia Porter, Users Group	March 87
9.	Delivery, installation and preliminary testing of hardware and software.	Vendor, Sylvia Porter	April 87
10.	Conduct pilot test and evaluate and make necessary changes.	Sylvia Porter and Office Management Team	April 87 - May 87
11.	Develop and deliver training activities for management and staff.	Joe Tide, Trainer	June 87
12.	Case file conversion to computerized files.	Sylvia Porter	July 87 - September 87
13.	Begin system switchover as outlined in system design document.	Vendor, Sylvia Porter	July 87 - December 87
14.	Evaluate and make necessary changes.	Sylvia Porter and Users Group	December 87 - January 88

FIGURE 23

YOUR ACTION PLAN

	TASKS	RESPONSIBLE PERSONS	TARGET DATES
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			

STEP FOUR - PILOT PROJECT PHASE

During this step you will:

- Plan and implement the pilot project;
- Evaluate pilot project analysis of observational and interview data obtained from trial users; and
- Enhance deficit areas identified during the evaluation process.

This step provides an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the new automation technology on case processing, management activities and operating procedures with a specific target audience prior to full scale implementation. Problems which have been identified include:

- Equipment that may not (or "may be") function as anticipated;
- Insufficient or incorrect supplies;
- Users who do not understand the equipment or applications;
- Errors in the programs, procedures etc.;
- Installation problems; and
- Details that were unnoticed during the planning stages.

I. Planning The Pilot Project

The pilot test should be well planned and involve as many people in the organization as possible. Figure 24 provides a list of issues and concerns you and your staff will need to consider in planning the pilot project to use in planning a pilot test.

PILOT PROJECT PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- Goals of the Pilot Project
- Expected Results
- Benefits
- Anticipated Problems and Ways to Handle Them
  (Identify individuals to serve as troubleshooters)
- Records to be Maintained
- Periodic Participant Feedback
- Training
- Support for Target Group
- Timeframes
- Evaluation and Feedback

FIGURE 24

2. Selecting The Pilot Test Site

Selecting the best target group for the pilot project is also very important to the success of your automation project. In some instances, your organization may be small enough to make the entire organization the test site. For larger organizations, using the entire organization might be too difficult to manage. Therefore, you will need to decide who will be your pilot test group. Figure 25 highlights some of the critical factors you should consider in making this decision:

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING YOUR PILOT TEST GROUP

- **Success Potential**
  Pilot testing should occur where the chances of achieving anticipated results is greatest. Although experiencing implementation difficulties is an important part of implementing an automation system, too much distress can be frustrating and reduce chances of organization-wide acceptance.

- **Management Support**
  Commitment of top management within the pilot site is very critical for (1) seeing the pilot through, and (2) inspiring others to be involved.

- **Employee Support**
  Distrust and dissatisfaction are potential obstacles that could lead to project failure. Pilot projects that are the shared responsibility of all employees have a greater chance for support.

- **Transferability**
  Pilot project sites should have elements common to other areas in the organization and use practices and procedures that can be transferred elsewhere.

- **Visibility**
  Pilot test results will provide specific examples of the potential impact office automation can have on performing and improving program operations. Ensuring that these results are "visible" to your organization, increases the likelihood of gaining greater support.

FIGURE 25

TEST-SITE CHECKLIST

POTENTIAL PILOT-TEST SITES	SUCCESS POTENTIAL	MANAGEMENT SUPPORT	EMPLOYEE SUPPORT	VISIBILITY
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3. Evaluating The Pilot Project

The evaluation process provides for the monitoring and enhancement of the case processing and management system before and after the pilot-test. Evaluation data will assist you and your staff gain additional insight necessary for successful full-scale automation implementation. During this evaluation, you and your staff should identify what is and is not working, and create strategies/methods for making necessary improvements.

Evaluation activities should focus on four major areas. They are:

1. Automation technology you are using within the system;

2. Case processing and management activities;

3. Outputs (i.e.; statistical reports, case file data, etc.); and

4. Users.

Using these four areas as a guide, you can develop a list of questions that will assist you during the evaluation process. Sample evaluation questions are provided in Figure 26 to use during your evaluation process.

SAMPLE PILOT-TESTING EVALUATION QUESTIONS

TECHNOLOGY

- Does the equipment meet your needs?
- Is equipment "user friendly" (easy to learn)?
- What correction should be made to the software?

PROCESS

- Has the automation made case processing and management more efficient?
- What case processing areas still need to be addressed?
- Does introducing office automation address your case processing needs?

PRODUCT

- How reliable is the information you receive from the system?
- Is the information being produced in a timely manner?
- Do you receive information you need to do your job?

USER

- Are users given adequate training?
- Is there enough technical support available to assist employees with problems?
- What are their reactions to the new system?

FIGURE 26

Use the space below to list other evaluation questions you think are important.

o

o

STEP FIVE - STAFF TRAINING

During this step you will:

- Assess training needs of your staff;
- Design and develop training and/or identify individuals (e.g., vendors, or training department) who will deliver desired training;
- Deliver training; and
- Evaluate training and identify future training needs.

No matter how carefully your office automation implementation is planned, its success depends on the people who actually use the technology to accomplish work assignments. Training is important because new users may not know how to use the equipment and/or understand its potential impact on improving program operations. For many managers, supervisors and staff personnel, exposure to the automation devices and concepts will occur in your office for the first time. Training (Step 4) then becomes the primary vehicle for:

- reducing employees' resistance to change caused by
  - fear of the unknown, and
  - fear of not being able to grasp new concepts.
- introducing the purpose and scope of the office automation project and providing specific details of "what they can expect."
- providing opportunity to learn as much as possible about the new technology and to experiment in a "non-threatening" environment.

The complete training process is outlined in Figure 27 and involves: assessing training needs, designing and developing training activities, delivering training and evaluating training.

ESSENTIAL STEPS OF THE TRAINING PROCESS

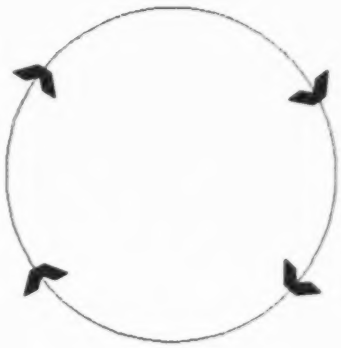
4. EVALUATE TRAINING AND IDENTIFY FUTURE TRAINING NEEDS
1. ASSESS TRAINING NEEDS
3. DELIVER TRAINING
2. DESIGN AND DEVELOP TRAINING

FIGURE 27

1. Assess Training Needs

As a result of Problem Analysis (Step One), various staff training needs will be identified. This data is very useful in identifying key target areas for training to address. Additional efforts may need to be made to identify more specific training needs than those collected in Problem Analysis (Step One). There are three types of training needs that should be identified and addressed during the training process. They are:

Knowledge -- What information do staff members need to acquire? Examples include:

- How office automation works.
- How to apply office automation to future work needs.

Attitudes -- What attitudes do employees have that could lead to the acceptance or rejection of automation efforts? Examples include:

- Fear of computerization.
- How automation can improve the office quality of work life.

Skills -- What skills do staff members need to acquire? Examples include:

- How to operate automation equipment.
- How to make improvements in the current system.

2. Design and Develop Training

Whether training is designed or developed inhouse, or by an outside trainer, several key topic areas should be included. They are:

- Overview of the automation project (scope, purpose, timeframes, etc.);

- How to operate equipment;
- The new or enhanced case processing and management system (the work activities that will involve using the new technology);
- Automation technology problems and their solutions; and
- Supply and maintenance procedures.

3. **Deliver Training**

The primary goal of training is to guide learners through various learning activities that will enable them to obtain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required in this case by implementation of office automation. A gradual, phased-in approach is most desirable for achieving training goals and objectives. Therefore, delivery of training may take place on several occasions rather than all in one or two sessions.

4. **Evaluate Training and Evaluate New Training Needs**

Evaluation data is needed to determine whether training:

- addresses needs, issues and concerns;
- increases knowledge and skill levels;
- fosters changes in negative attitudes; and
- enhances on-the-job performance.

In addition, the evaluation process is also useful in identifying future training needs. Techniques for collecting evaluation data include: participant questionnaires, participant feedback sessions, and observations.

Child Support offices and other organizations which have initiated office automation training indicate the usefulness of:

1. Providing training in a gradual, step-by-step process.

This phased approach to training reduces the chances of employees feeling overwhelmed. Instead, manageable amounts of information are presented to employees in a way that promotes: (1) knowledge and skill building, and (2) changes in negative attitudes about office automation.

2. Using professional trainers or vendors to deliver training.

Too often, managers and supervisors rely on: (1) self-training manuals, which are sometimes very difficult to follow; and (2) newly trained employees, lacking business, training and technical expertise to teach other employees needed knowledge and skills. Use of professional trainers who know how to teach the "adult" learner and address technical information and skills is a more cost-effective way of integrating automation technology into the working lives of your employees.

3. Addressing the need for follow-up training

Training should be viewed as an ongoing process. As changes, modifications, additions, and deletions are made to your new system (whether procedures, equipment, or concepts), employees need to be informed and trained so their performance is maintained at an acceptable level and potential resistance to change is minimized.

TRAINING DO's AND DON'Ts

Do's	Dont's
• expect resistant to change	• don't rely solely on training manuals
• develop a phased-in process	• don't rely on inexperienced or newly trained employees to teach other employees
• provide follow-up training	• don't expect employees to become professional or proficient overnight
• provide vendors or professional trainers to conduct the training	

FIGURE 28

STEP SIX - FULL-SCALE IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION AND REFINEMENT

During this step you will:

- o Implement your office automation project;
- o Collect and analyze evaluation data; and
- o Redefine staff roles and operating procedures.

This step allows for the full-scale operation of the new or enhanced case processing and management system. Whether you've added word processing technology or a network of minicomputers to your program operation effort, some refinements will more than likely be required. Therefore, you will also need to collect data and evaluate the:

- o Usefulness of the automation technology;
- o Efficiency and effectiveness of the main case processing and management system; and
- o Adequacy of staff training.

As a result, you may need to revert to previously completed steps of this six-step process (i.e., Needs Analysis, Action Planning) to assist you and your staff in completing all needed activities.

While approaching the implementation phase in this process, there are several important considerations to keep in mind. They are:

- o Identify and clarify expectations of management and staff at all levels ;
- o Identify the indicators of implementation progress and closely monitor them;
- o Keep communication lines open at all levels; and
- o Maintain a supportive environment for management and staff.

CONCLUSION

With increasing demands for child support services from AFDC and non-AFDC clients, expanding interstate activity and with shrinking budgets and staffing, management is continually faced with the challenge of doing more with less. How then can child support offices meet these challenges? One way is for offices to devise more effective case processing systems. Managers today must capitalize on effective systems so they can make the most informed and cost effective decisions possible.

The information in this workbook provides an overview of case processing and its elements; addresses how to plan, develop and manage an effective and efficient system; and provides tools and techniques to assist in upgrading and enhancing a IV- D case processing and case management system. In addition, it discusses a term heard quite frequently in most work settings "Office Automation." The concepts of automation, benefits derived and a six step process (e.g., Needs Analysis, Selection of Automation, Action Planning, Pilot Project Phase, Staff Training and Refinement and Full Evaluation) for automating an office are presented.

By identifying and using those portions of the workbook that are pertinent to your organizational needs, management should have the type of information which can assist in making timely cost effective decisions. Although no models are given because of program differences and complexities, the examples presented are so universal that they may be useful for many applications.

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